

Baroalba - Hill 420 Circle: March 4-17, 2012

Baroalba Creek is the main drainage for Mount Brockman, a large, irregularly shaped massif sitting on the plains a few kilometres away from the edge of the Arnhem escarpment. Its maximum dimensions are about 11 kilometres east to west and 15 kilometres north to south. Its maximum height is about 300 metres above sea level, about 240 metres above the surrounding plain. While the edges of the massif are extremely rugged and steep, much of the centre consists of a large basin drained by Baroalba Creek. The rugged nature of the approaches prevented buffalo from reaching the basin, making this one of the few undisturbed areas in Kakadu. The area is full of rock shelters that were used by Aboriginal people over the millennia. It contains what may well be the greatest concentration of Aboriginal rock art in Australia, dating from the most ancient to the most recent. (Because of the archaeological importance of this area, walking parties are restricted to a maximum of seven people.) The best time to visit this area is during or immediately after the green season when every creek is flowing and the waterholes are all full.

The walk is described in a clockwise direction. Some groups do it in reverse.

The walk starts with an easy three kilometre stroll along an old four wheel drive track to Baroalba Springs where we can enjoy a refreshing swim. From here, we leave all tracks behind, beginning a somewhat strenuous scramble up the boulder strewn creek. Once inside the basin, the ground levels out and the walking becomes easier. There are a number of nice camp sites to tempt us as we work our way upstream, taking our time, stopping every so often to have a swim or just to enjoy the shade of a cool rock shelter or the sight of a particularly colourful patch of flowers.

Next day we continue our leisurely walk through the art sites and interesting rock formations in the central basin. Among the many things we will encounter are a nice set of cascades and a rock shelter which offers fantastic views up and down the valley. Words cannot do it justice. No one who has ever been there has left disappointed.

We plan to spend at least six days exploring the basin, probably spending one or two nights on high points which offer magnificent 360° views. The climbs are fairly steep and we will need to carry water, but we can leave excess gear in rock shelters below so our packs will be as light as possible.

From the central basin, we work our way over to and down the eastern side of the massif and across the plain to the Arnhem Escarpment where we set up a base camp near the entrance to a small gorge. This area has so much to offer that we will spend several days enjoying the pools, exploring the nearby creeks with their rock shelters and art sites. We will climb to the top of Hill 420, the highest point on the entire Arnhem escarpment, perhaps as a day walk, perhaps camping overnight.

Finally it is time to leave. A walk back across the plain brings us to the relatively unknown eastern edge of the Brockman massif. We follow this, stopping to look at anything that looks interesting. On the final morning, we have a walk of up to seven kilometres, part of which may be over rough terrain, to reach the vehicles. From Baroalba, it is a relatively short drive to Cooina. After a cook-your-own barbecue at the pub, we spend the night in budget accommodation, avoiding the mosquitoes which plague the wetlands. Next morning, we do a Yellow Waters cruise and get a good view of the Kakadu wetlands before returning to Darwin

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 4

Climate Level 5. It will be hot (although not as hot as you might think) and it will be humid. The average daily maximum is 33°C (91°F). If we get a spell of relatively dry weather, the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F). The average minimum is 24°C (75°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is almost certain.

On average it will rain two days out of three, mostly in short, sharp bursts. Averages can, however, be misleading. Occasionally, it might rain for days at a time. (This makes it somewhat harder to walk but it also makes the waterfalls more spectacular and keeps it relatively cool.) Occasionally, it may rain very little. This makes it substantially hotter than normal. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.

Terrain	<p>Level 3.</p> <p>Section 2. Variable. Going up Baroalba Creek at the beginning is a slow scramble over rocks of a variety of sizes. Frequent rest and swim stops make it easier. Once in the central basin, the walking becomes fairly flat and relatively easy until you do the high point climbs. People who have never walked in this kind of terrain may find that this is one of the most physically demanding things they have ever done. Baroalba Creek has many rock shelters if we wish to get out of any rain which may be occurring.</p> <p>The walk across to Hill 420 involves a steep descent followed by a walk across the plain. The terrain near Hill 420 is similar to that at Baroalba.</p> <p>The climbs are relatively short but quite steep and rugged. A few short sections of most of the climbs are quite exposed and many people will need some assistance. Most people will need to pass packs in at least one point both on the ascent and descent. <i>People who have a severe fear of heights should not choose this trip.</i></p> <p>The creeks are likely to be low enough so that swimming across with packs will not be necessary. Exceptional rain could cause this to change.</p> <p>Even in the boggiest of seasons, Kakadu has nothing that can compare with the mud of Tasmania. However, if you have a particularly wet year, you may find yourself sinking up to mid calf regularly on some sections.</p> <p>None of the walking is on a marked trail. If you have never done any off-track walking through moderately rough terrain, nothing we can say can adequately describe the experience. The photos on our website, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au, can give you a partial picture, but they cannot substitute for the real thing. Most of those who have not had any off-track walking experience find it more difficult than those who have done it before. Anyone who does not regularly (average twice a month) go bushwalking carrying a full pack would benefit from doing some pre-trip training. Do this and you will almost certainly enjoy the trip. If you are not an experienced off-track bushwalker and you don't do any training or any other form of strenuous physical exercise, you might feel that the trip is more of an endurance test than the pleasure most people experience.</p>
Vegetation	<p>Level 3-4. Much of the walking is through relatively flat, open woodland with a grassy understorey. Some short sections of grass may hide a broken rocky surface where you will have to be particularly careful. There may be some slow sections where you will have to pass through thick scrub. The vegetation can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt.</p> <p>The spear grass normally reaches its peak at this time of year, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We are likely to encounter sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass which will make for difficult going. Those near the front find it substantially more difficult than those near the end.</p>
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3-4. You need to carry 12 days food. This will include about 3½-4½ kg of the evening meals. You do not need a sleeping bag but you do need a tent and fly.
Art	This is one of the best areas for rock art in the park.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are good to excellent but we have to avoid some of our dry season campsites which could get flooded. You are unlikely to see anyone else anywhere along most of the routes.
Swims	This is the best time to see the waterfalls on this route. Later in the year, they will dry up completely. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot. You are unlikely to have to float your pack across a flooded creeks. Exceptional rains could cause this to change.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying 12 days food.
Highlights	Beautiful waterfalls. Spectacular hill top views. Good swimming. A wealth of Aboriginal art sites.
Wildlife	The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine. Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals. The Yellow Waters cruise is excellent for birds, many of which you are unlikely to see on the walk. It also gives you a good chance to see large estuarine crocodiles.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Notes

A day pack is recommended, as is a spare garbage bag to store things if we camp on a high point.

It is very important that you pack well enough so that you can keep the contents of your pack dry, even if you have to pack a wet tent or other wet items.

Exceptionally severe flooding can mean that we have to walk a portion of the vehicle track leading to the Baroalba car park.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives. You may not be able to easily get things out of your pack during the day.

If the spinifex is bad, something we can't tell in advance, gaiters will be essential.

Map. 1:50 000 Nourlangie Creek or 1:100 000 Cahill. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows the area in relation to the rest of the park.

Cooinda

Cooinda is a resort situated in the heart of the Kakadu wetlands. This is an area noted for its wildlife — and mosquitoes. The former make it a great place to visit, the latter make it an uncomfortable place for an overnight walk. The attractions at Cooinda include the Yellow Waters cruises, the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and a short dry season nature walk along a marked trail.

The Yellow Waters cruise provides the best way to see the wetlands and allows you to approach the wildlife much closer than you could do on foot. The cultural centre is a few hundred metres from the hotel and campground and provides an insight into the lives of the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park.

Both the cultural centre and the hotel offer a variety of souvenirs for sale. Bring extra cash or a credit card if you think that you might wish to purchase anything beyond the drinks, ice creams and lunches that most people purchase there.

Itinerary: Baroalba - Hill 420 Circle

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

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

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn, 122 The Esplanade. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 7-8 a.m. pick up. The exact time will be arranged at the pre-trip meeting. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure or have made alternative arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street.
Drive to Kakadu. There will be a stop on the way to buy cool drinks, etc.
Begin walk, carrying full packs, bush camp.

Day 2–12 Bush camping, carrying full packs part of the time, day packs at other times.

Day 13 Return to vehicles. Drive to Cooinda, arriving mid to late afternoon. Yellow Waters cruise and visit to Aboriginal cultural centre. Drive to Jabiru. Book into budget accommodation. Hot shower. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. (You can leave clean clothes and a towel in the vehicle during the walk.) Restaurant meal.

Day 14 Drive to Darwin. Drop off at your accommodation, mid to late afternoon.