

Baroalba - Hill 420 Circle: March 5-18, 2017

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



The two photos above were taken from the same rock shelter on two different wet season trips. They look out over part of the central basin when the main creek is running at its wet season best.

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. (In keeping with the wishes of the traditional owners of the area, we have not included any photos of the art sites in these notes. Because of the archaeological importance of this area, walking parties are normally restricted to a maximum of nine people.) The best time to visit this area is during or immediately after the wet 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. We have modified our original itinerary to make it slightly longer and put it on earlier to meet the needs of those who booked early.



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 after we cross the creek. Sometimes we need to wade and sometimes we can find a dry crossing as shown at left. From here, we leave all tracks behind, beginning a somewhat strenuous scramble up a small 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.



Ground orchid.



The wade above is normally done on day 2. While the depth varies, it is always a wade.

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. (The photos at the top of this page were taken from this shelter.) Words cannot do it justice. No one who has ever been there has left disappointed. But, never forget – this is the wet season. You will certainly have to wade the creek several times.



Camping on a high point.

We plan to spend at least six days exploring the basin. We often spend two nights at the campsite shown at right. We may even spend 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.



As you can see, wet season or no, we still have a campfire at night. The group fly in the right background provides us all with shelter at dinnertime if it happens to be raining.



From the central basin, we work our way through a small pass, 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. The walk through the pass is in thick shade. In some places, the scrub makes it slow going. Once we get to the edge, we get some great views. Then comes the descent. It is

steep and slow, but it is shady so it is much easier than it would be in the full sun. The slow going means that many groups spend the night in the broad valley between the Brockman Massif and the Arnhem Escarpment.



The descent.

Once across the main valley, we head past the end of the main escarpment and set up camp at a lovely spot where the creek from Hill 420 enters the plains. Watching the nearby cliffs across the pool light up in the late afternoon sun is a magnificent sight.



Sunset view from camp below Hill 420.

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 hope to climb to the top of Hill 420, the highest point on the entire Arnhem Escarpment, perhaps as a day walk, perhaps camping overnight. If we do camp on the top, being able to leave some things below and find water $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way up means that our packs don't have to be too heavy.



Camping on top of Hill 420

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 Coinda where we plan to do the a short cultural and bush tucker walk with one of the senior Aboriginal traditional owners. We spend the night in budget accommodation and have a meal at the bistro.



Crossing the plains near the end of the walk.

In the Wet, the Yellow Waters boats are usually far from full.

On the final morning, we do the early morning Yellow Waters cruise, then drive back to Darwin, arriving mid to late afternoon.

Notes

We strongly recommend that anyone interested in this trip have a good look at all three of our **Walking in the Wet** pages beginning with www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml

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.

Cultural obligations can occasionally prevent the walk with the senior Aboriginal traditional owner from taking place.

Speargrass is likely to be bad in some areas. There is no avoiding getting some seeds.

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

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. Sleeping bags are not needed.

The average daily maximum is 34°C (93°F). The average minimum is 25°C (77°F). While that is high, the all time record high for January is 38°C (100°F). On average, January is slightly cooler than dry season August.

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.



Swim stop near Hill 420.

Terrain

Level 3. 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.

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.

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. ***People who have a severe fear of heights should not choose this trip.***

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.

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.

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.



Shady camp, Baroalba Creek.



Enjoying a natural spa.

Vegetation	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. The spear grass can be a problem at this time. Even so, those near the rear may sometimes find it substantially easier than those near the front. Everyone needs to take a turn near the front.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 4. You need to carry 14 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 creek. 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 14 days food.
Highlights	Beautiful waterfalls. Spectacular hill top views. Good swimming. A wealth of Aboriginal art sites. The lush green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. While you are unlikely to see many large animals, the small ones can be spectacular. The Leichhardt grasshopper, known as Alyurr or 'children of the Lightning Man' to the local people was first described by explorer Ludwig Leichhardt in the 1840s and not rediscovered by modern science until the 1970s.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.



Firetail skink.



Leichhardt grasshopper.

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.

For more information, please refer to our Cooinda and Yellow Waters page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/yellowtrs.shtml – this has links to a number of other useful pages describing things like the walk with the senior Aboriginal traditional owner.

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, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street and is the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance. Both Double Tree hotels were Holiday Inns until early 2013.

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 Coinda, arriving early afternoon. Visit Aboriginal cultural centre. Short bush tucker & culture walk with a senior traditional owner. Book into budget accommodation. Hot shower. Bring toiletries and money for drinks. (You can leave clean clothes and a towel in the vehicle during the walk.) Restaurant meal.

Day 14 Early morning Yellow Waters cruise. Drive to Darwin. Drop off at your accommodation, mid to late afternoon.

Final Note We may or may not ever be able to offer this walk again.