

DRAFT: Jawoyn Explorer: May 13 – June 2, 2012

Arnhem Land! We have again received permission from the Jawoyn Association which represents the traditional owners of the region near Katherine to run the trip we ran in 1999, 2004 and 2005. The route takes us to the headwaters of the Katherine River in the southwest corner of Kakadu and the southeast corner of Arnhem Land. Both areas are normally out of bounds to bushwalkers.

We have only run a few trips like this before. **We don't know if we will be able to do it again.** What makes it so different?

- We expect to be accompanied by a local Aboriginal guide. Offering employment to an Aboriginal guide is not only something we want to do, it is one of the conditions of our permit.
Everyone who took part in our two previous trips said that the Aboriginal guides added a whole new dimension to the trip.
- Part of the walk is in Arnhem Land. It took us ten years to get permission for a walk in Arnhem Land. This is only our second such trip.
- We will have a helicopter food drop at the halfway point. This is the only walk in the top half of the NT where we can do this.

The route we will follow is based on the one we did on our three previous trips. It ranges from open plains to deep gorges. (The upper gorge on the Katherine River is shorter but in some ways more spectacular than the commonly visited tourist gorge near Katherine.) Almost all of the walk is along creeks but there are some short sections where we move from one creek to another. Campsites include both sandy beaches and flat rock ledges. We will almost certainly see some Aboriginal rock art along the way. In order to give more people a chance to experience this country in the company of a local Aboriginal, we have split the trip into two sections, either of which may be done on its own.

Section 1: Manyallaluk to the Upper Katherine Gorge: May 13-23

We begin with the 320 km drive from Darwin to Katherine where we have a break before continuing to Manyallaluk where the good road disappears. From here, we continue along a 4WD track to somewhere near Birdie Creek. (The drive took a day and a half in 1999 and 2004. how long it will take this time depends on how heavy and how late a wet season we have.)

Birdie Creek is one of the major tributaries of the Katherine River. We follow it upstream into Arnhem Land for about a week, passing through a variety of landscapes including open plains and small to medium gorges. Some of the going is fairly rough, some is quite easy. If time permits, we may drop our packs and spend some time exploring one or more of the interesting side creeks we pass along the way.

After about a week, we leave Birdie Creek and head cross country to a series of small creeks which drain into the upper reaches of the Katherine River. This was one of the most spectacular sections of our first trip – beautiful pools, gorges and waterfalls. We plan to spend two nights in one camp and spend the day exploring this area without heavy packs.

On the final full day, we walk down to the Katherine River above the upper gorge and set up a camp where we will spend two nights. The next morning, a helicopter flies in bringing our food for the second section along with anyone joining us. Those doing only the first section then fly back to Katherine.

Section 2: Upper Katherine Gorge to Manyallaluk: May 23 - June 2

After stashing all our new supplies, we leave our camp and head down stream to explore the Upper Katherine Gorge. In some areas, wall to wall water or waterfalls make it impossible to go through the gorge so we will have to climb up and walk through the rough and rock area at the top. The views make the effort well worth while. That night we enjoy the special meal brought in with the food drop.

The next day we leave the river and head overland stopping to explore a few small creeks (more pools and waterfalls) as we work our way over to Fanny Creek, another of the Katherine River's major tributaries. We follow this downstream for several days before heading overland once more, this time to a tributary of Birdie Creek which we follow down to where it joins the route we took on the way in. If time permits, we will continue all the way down to the Katherine River for our final bush camp before returning to the cars.

If the road is anything like it was on our first two trips, we will camp somewhere along the way. If it is substantially better as it was in 2005, we may be able to do it all in a single day. If we delay the departure by a week, we can finish by spending part of the final day at the annual Barunga Festival, either camping in the community or nearby that night.

Terrain and difficulty.

Overall	We rate this as level 3.
Climate	Level 2. Average daytime max 30-32°C (86-90°F), average nighttime min 15-18°C (59-64°F). Generally low humidity. Rain unlikely.
Terrain	Level 3. Much of the walk is along relatively flat ground following creeks. There is, however, a substantial amount of rock hopping and there are a few short but steep climbs. Although we rate it as level 3, if we have to vary our route for some reason, we cannot be certain that there will not be some harder sections along the way.
Vegetation	Level 2-3. Can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. At this time of year, most of the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. There may be some sections of thick scrub.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 11 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Art	We visit a variety of art sites.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are very good; some are superb. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.
Swims	Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Highlights	Getting into Arnhem Land with an Aboriginal guide. Great swims, real wilderness experience.
Lowlights	Carrying food for 11 days. Some rough terrain.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible in many places. We had fresh fish on several occasions on our first trip to the area.

Maps. 1:50 000 Fannie Creek, Sleisbeck and possibly a short section on Gimbat or 1:100 000 Stow and Snowdrop.

Notes

This trip is relatively expensive for a variety of reasons.

- We must pay a per person fee for permission to walk across the Jawoyn lands.
- We must pay for both our guide and the Aboriginal guide or Jawoyn Association staff.
- The helicopter must come a long way to reach us. Although helicopters are expensive, using one allows us to extend the walk to three weeks and make the most of this opportunity without having to carry super heavy loads.
- The track to the beginning of the walk is one of the roughest we use anywhere so the wear and tear on the vehicles is higher than normal.

Three of our four largest costs (our guide, the Aboriginal guide and the helicopter food drop) are not affected by the number of people on the trip. The fourth, transport, is unaffected past the first six clients. Rather than charge a huge price which would cover us for small groups, we prefer to offer the trip at a reasonable price with a surcharge for smaller groups.

The surcharge will be payable immediately prior to departure if and only if we do not have eight or more clients. That charge is not subject to any discounts and is as follows.

4 people: \$900 each 5 people: \$375 each 6 people: \$250 each 7 people: \$150 each

Similarly, in order to keep our prices reasonable, we have based our price for those doing either half of the trip on approximately equal numbers coming in and out with the helicopter.

If substantially more people choose one section than the other, we will have to charge extra for the empty space in the helicopter going one way. This charge could be as high as \$500 per person. If you book one section, we will let you know whether or not there might be an extra charge at least two months prior to departure.

As there will be a food drop, you should have your food for the second half in a parcel which can be given to the guide at the trip meeting the night before departure.

It should be possible for us to arrange to have a few fresh things brought in with the food drop. If you want anything fresh brought in, bring a list to the pre-trip meeting.

A day pack would be useful for the first day on section two. Alternatively, you can leave your gear in camp and use your main pack.

Those doing only one section of the trip will have to catch a bus to or from Katherine and provide their own accommodation in Katherine. We can book that for you if you would like.

In 1999 and 2004, the 4WD track to the start of the track was so bad that the drives in and out took about 1½ days each. In 2005, we got to the start on the first day.

Date change. If those who book early would like to attend the Barunga Festival at the Barunga Aboriginal community, we may be able to delay the start by a week.

Itinerary: Jawoyn Explorer

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

Note 2 **This itinerary may be subject to change.**

Section 1

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn Darwin, 122 The Esplanade. **Note.** There are two Holiday Inns next to each other on the Esplanade. The meeting is in the taller one, closer to the roundabout at the end of the street. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.

Day 1 Drive to the start of the walk via the Manyallaluk Aboriginal community. Begin walk carrying full packs. The drive will take most of the day so we are unlikely to walk far.

Day 2–10 Bush camping, probably carrying full packs every day. There may be a full day or several half-day walks without full packs.

Day 11 Food drop. We'll probably spend the night where we get the drop so that we can enjoy a few small luxuries without having to carry them. Those leaving here fly back to Katherine with the helicopter. Whether or not it will be possible to return to Darwin that day will depend on the bus schedule at the time.

Section 2

Day 10 Those beginning with this section catch a bus to Katherine.

Day 11 Those beginning with section two will be collected from their accommodation and driven to the helicopter landing pad for the flight. Day walk near the drop off point.

Day 12-19 Bush camping, probably carrying full packs every day. There may be a full day or several half-day walks without full packs. Camp as near as possible to our pick up point on day 20.

Day 20 Finish walk. Barunga Festival, camp in Barunga or at a nearby bush site.

Day 21 Return to Darwin