

Kakadu Circle No. 1: May 7-28, 2017

The 2006 20th Anniversary trip and the ones which followed in 2007 and 2015 were so good that none of those who took part could understand why the trip has run so seldom in recent years. We can't understand why there was so little interest for 2008-14. This trip is designed to allow more time than normal for visiting Aboriginal art sites and exploring the areas near our path. There may be one or more occasions when we spend two nights in one camp so that we can take a full day to explore nearby areas. Those who prefer not to go exploring may use the extra time for bird watching or photography — or just relaxing and enjoying their surroundings.

Every season has its advantages but when people ask us when they should come, we tell them, “**If you plan to come to Kakadu only once, we advise you to do it in May.**” May is normally the month when the humidity of the post wet season gives way to the Dry. It is the time when the weather finally cools off at night. Water is still plentiful and most of the waterfalls are still flowing well. Many of the 4WD tracks in the park remain closed so we can enjoy many areas without the tourist masses who arrive later in the year.

It is very unlikely that the track into Twin Falls will be open so we should have it to ourselves. This also means that it may be impossible to do only a part of the trip. See the notes at the end for more information.

Section 1: Koolpin to Twin: Approx May 7-17

The walk begins at Flying Fox Crossing on the South Alligator River in the southern part of Kakadu, about 330 kilometres and four to five hours from Darwin. A relatively flat eight kilometre walk along the banks of the river and across the plain brings us to a ridge near the beginning of Koolpin Gorge. Cutting across the ridge and joining the creek above the first two waterfalls keeps us out of reach of the estuarine crocs which have begun coming into the lower reaches in recent years.



Lower Koolpin Falls from the ridge

Koolpin Gorge is beautiful. The pools are perfect for swimming, the waterfalls and views a photographers delight. Aboriginal art sites tell us that this has been a special place for thousands of years. Although the gorge is only four kilometres long, it is too good to rush through. We take at least a day to reach the top.

From the top of the gorge, we normally follow Koolpin Creek, then one of its tributaries, as we search out some of the Aboriginal art sites which line the route.



Climbing the ridge at Koolpin



Koolpin Creek, campsite above gorge



Walking along the Koolpin tributary

A short walk through a pass brings us to a small tributary of Twin Falls Creek. The immediate area contains an abundance of Aboriginal art sites. Because this is just the beginning of the dry season, there is enough water to allow us to take at least one full day, probably two, to really get to know the area.



Walking through the pass between Koolpin and Twin

Not far from these sites, in a rocky area near where we first reach Twin Falls Creek, there are more excellent art sites. We spend additional time here, visiting the art sites. Continuing downstream, Twin Falls Creek passes through a mix of sandy and rocky areas for about six kilometres to the Amphitheatre Falls where the river drops 20 metres into the upper gorge. Few groups have ever been able to resist spending at least an hour here just admiring the views and enjoying the pool below the falls. Another seven kilometres past sandy beaches and more pools brings us to the top of Twin Falls.



Amphitheatre Falls



Swim stop, upper Twin Falls Creek gorge

Twin Falls consists of a series of drops of up to 20 metres and a final 80 metre plunge into the gorge below. Here we have a break and take time to enjoy the spectacular views. If water levels are low, the route to the bottom of the lower gorge is on a marked trail, as easy as any part of the walk.



Twin Falls Creek campsite

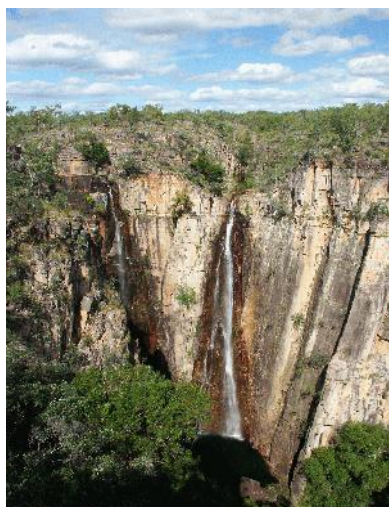
Swimming in the pool below the gorge is strictly prohibited because of the danger of large crocodiles (never a problem above the escarpment where almost of our walk takes place).

If water levels are too high to safely cross Twin Falls Creek below the gorge, we will cross above the falls and come down on the far side as we do on our wet season trips. This route is substantially more difficult and will take at least half a day. It does, however, reward you with some spectacular views of Twin Falls which are not possible from anywhere else.

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana (first few km at beginning of walk), Koolpin & Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Stow (1st few km at beginning of walk) & Jim Jim.

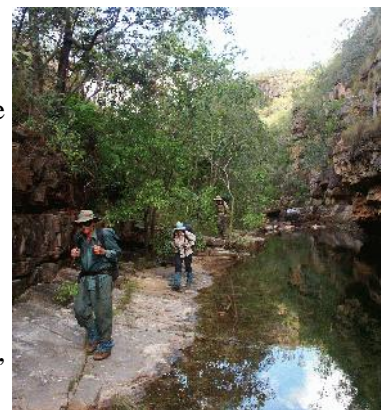
Section 2: Twin to Gunlom: Approx May 17-28

From Twin Falls, we do what is normally the longest single day's walk on any of our Kakadu trips. Fortunately, this early in the year, we have the option of stopping in places that run dry later. However, we do it, the route finishes with a climb back to the top of the escarpment where we will spend some time enjoying the views and pools at Surprise Falls.



Main falls, Graveside Gorge

From Surprise Falls, we continue across the plateau, passing through the largest patch of open country rainforest in the park, across the upper reaches of Koolpin Creek and over to the top of Graveside Gorge where a double waterfall drops 100 metres into a pool in the gorge below. After taking time to have a good look at Graveside, we move along to Cascades Creek and the first of its many pools and art sites. The walk down the four kilometre gorge is a slow one. There are a few places where you have the choice of edging along narrow rock ledges (close to water level, no big drops), floating your pack through the creek, or climbing up and around.



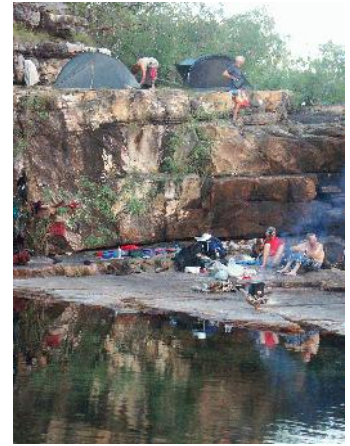
Walking along Cascades Creek

The pools and art sites are too nice to pass by, so stops are frequent as we make our way down to the cascades for which the creek is named. The last 500 metres often takes two hours or more as the deep pools and a natural water slide are much too inviting to pass by in a rush.



Multi-trunked Gronophyllum

Next, we visit Gronophyllum Creek with its unusual multi-trunked palms, beautiful, sandy camp sites and deep, clear pools. The rugged landscape away from the creek is reminiscent of central Australia with its red rock and spinifex covered hills. A short, steep climb to the top of one of the hills presents us with an incredible panorama. Following the creek, you might walk three kilometres in an hour. Following a straight-line compass bearing, the landscape is such a jumble of broken rock that three kilometres might take you three days.



Gronophyllum Creek campsite



Top falls & pool, Barramundi

From Gronophyllum, we cross to the Barramundi system and its many waterfalls. Our final campsite in Barramundi Valley is on the banks of a huge, shady pool below a small waterfall. It is a beautiful spot, but there is more to come.

The next morning is rather strenuous. A one kilometre walk brings us to the steepest climb of the trip. From the spectacular vantage point at the top of the hill we enjoy a magnificent view out across the plateau and over the broken rock country that makes up the headwaters of Waterfall Creek. A climb down to a small rocky plateau brings us to a creek where nature has created a place which a number of people have said is their favourite in all Kakadu. We take our time so that we can fully appreciate this location.



High view, Waterfall Creek headwaters



Waterfall Creek plateau, termite mound

From this area, another climb takes us down past more Aboriginal art and onto the plain above Gunlom Falls. A six kilometre walk brings us to a rocky area with numerous pools and cascades. A further four kilometres gets us to the top of Gunlom Falls where we enjoy a view out over the plains below. From Gunlom, we take our bus to Cooina. Late that afternoon, we do a bush tucker and culture walk with one of the senior Aboriginal traditional owners of this part of the park. After a bistro meal at the pub, we spend the night in budget accommodation, avoiding the mosquitoes which plague the wetlands.



Dinner time, Waterfall Creek, last night

Next morning, we do a Yellow Waters cruise and get a good view of the Kakadu wetlands before returning to Darwin and the airport, ready for the flight home.

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana (short bit of walk), Jim Jim Falls, Koolpin & Goodparla or 1:100 000 Jim Jim & Mundogie.

Notes

You need to have a package containing your breakfasts and lunches for the second half to give to the guide at the pre trip meeting. Fail to bring it and you might have to carry it.

You should also prepare a package containing a change of clothes and a towel to come out with the bus if you want to take advantage of the hot showers at Cooina. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks at the pub.

Large crocodiles have come into the pools below the escarpment during the wet season many times during recent years. Unless we are somewhere which has already been checked and opened by park authorities, there will be no swimming anywhere below the escarpment.

Unless the roads to Jim Jim and Twin Falls open incredibly early, we will be unable to visit Jim Jim Falls. This is both for safety reasons and because the time required would make the trip substantially more difficult. **If**, however, the first four who book all wish to include it, we can rearrange the itinerary to do so. Please contact us if you are interested in this option.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives. It may not be possible to get at your pack until the vehicle is unloaded at the end.

All photos in these notes were taken on our May Kakadu Circle trips in 2006 and 2007. In deference to the wishes of the traditional owners of the area, we have not included any photos of the art sites in these notes.

Map. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas but is not suitable for navigation.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2-3. May is a transition month when the weather gradually turns cooler and less humid. The average daily maximum temperature is 32-33°C (90-92°F). The average nightly minimum ranges from about 17°C (62°F) in the southern part of the park to about 22°C (71°F) in the north. Averages can, however, be misleading. We have had the temperature drop as low as 10°C (50°F) in May on one of these trips. Sleeping bags are essential. Rain is unlikely, but still possible so we recommend that you bring a tent or mosquito net with a fly to ensure against getting wet at night.

Terrain Level 3. There are few steep climbs, none of which is over 200 m. As short as they are, these climbs are strenuous. Some may require using your hands to hold on as you climb up or down. None are technically difficult. None require ropes or other special equipment. There will be some places where you have to step from stone to stone as you walk along the edge of a creek.

The creeks are low enough so that swimming across with packs is unlikely to be necessary. It may, however, be necessary to wade across slippery rocks through waist deep water. Your guide can help if you need assistance.

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 in these notes and 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.

Vegetation Level 2-3. 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. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out. Wildflowers are particularly abundant at this time of year.



Wading across Twin Falls Creek



Rock hopping along Cascades Creek



From left to right above: *Pimelea punicia*, *Utricularia fulva* (bladderwort), *Gomphrena Canescans* (bush everlasting), unknown grevillea, *Banksia dentata* (swamp banksia).

- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer. Some days will be shorter. This is the most leisurely and relaxing long distance Kakadu trip we offer..
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry 10 days food. This will include about 3-4 kg of the evening meals. You need a sleeping bag and a tent or mosquito net with a fly.
- Art** We visit a variety of art sites. Two areas we pass through are among the best for art in the park.
- Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at any of the campsites.
- Swims** May is a good month to see Kakadu's waterfalls. Most creeks are still flowing well and the swimming is excellent. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
- Lowlights** Carrying food for 11 days. Possible heat and humidity, especially early in the trip.
- Highlights** Kakadu's waterfalls seen early in the dry season without the dry season tourist crowds. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites.
- Wildlife** 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 estaurine crocodiles.

Left to right below: estaurine crocodile, dingo, rufous night heron.



Fishing Not permitted on this walk.

Cooinda and Bowali

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 approach the wildlife (especially birds and crocodiles) much closer than you could do on foot. The cultural centre is a few hundred metres from the hotel and provides an insight into the lives of the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park. The nature walk offers a pleasant way to spend an hour or two, especially early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

The Bowali Visitor Centre just outside Jabiru has good displays about the natural history of the park. All are worth a visit.

Warradjan, Bowali and the Cooinda hotel all 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.

Want more info? Have a look at the following pages on our website.

- **Photo gallery and report from the first section of our 2006 Kakadu Circle No. 1**
<http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/galleries/oldsite/kc1-061gal.shtml>
- **Photo gallery and report from the first section of our 2006 Kakadu Circle No. 1**
<http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/galleries/oldsite/kc1-062gal.shtml>
- **Comments written by the participants on our 2006 Kakadu Circle No. 1**
<http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/kc1-06comment.shtml>
- **Pieces of Kakadu**, thoughts about the trip from an artist who came on our 2006 Kakadu Circle No. 1
<http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/kc1-06-cora.pdf>
- **Kakadu Vignettes**, thoughts about the 2006 trip from two of the other participants.
<http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/pdf/kc1-06-john.pdf>
- **Cooinda and Yellow Waters**. Our Cooinda and Yellow Waters page has more information about this area. <http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/yellowtrs.shtml>. It also has links to
 - A Yellow Waters photo gallery, <http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/galleries/oldsite/yellowgal.shtml>
 - Violet Lawson's Wurrng Cultural Tour, <http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/lawsongal.shtml>

Note If the links above don't work, you can copy and paste them into your browser. They contain a lot more information than we can include here.

Itinerary: Kakadu Circle No. 1

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, 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 8 a.m. pick up. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure or have made other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–11 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 12 Food drop. (This could be a day early or a day late.)

Day 13–19 Bush camping, carrying full packs every day.

Day 21 Return to vehicles. Drive to Cooinda. Bush tucker and culture tour with senior Aboriginal traditional owner Violet Lawson. Visit Warradjan. Overnight in budget accommodation.

Day 22 Early morning Yellow Waters cruise. Drive back to Darwin via Nourlangie and/or the Bowali Visitor Centre. Drop off at your accommodation mid afternoon.

Final Note 1 Cultural reasons can occasionally cause the cancellation of the bush tucker and culture tour. As this was a special add on not included in the original price, there will be no refund if this happens.

Final Note 2 We cannot run this trip unless we get permission to use a helicopter. We have applied for that permission but have not yet received an answer.