

Kakadu Circle No. 3: July 16-31, 2012

Section 1: Koolpin to Twin: July 16-22

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 the beginning of Koolpin Gorge.

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, there are a number of possible routes to Twin Falls Creek. Your guide will decide which one to take based on the availability of water and on the interests and energy of the group. All take about two days. None is particularly difficult. All offer the opportunity to view a number of Aboriginal art sites, either on the main route or as a side trip from it.

Continuing downstream from where we first meet it, 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. The last two km of this route is in a restricted area where we have to stick to a marked trail.

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. The route to the bottom of the lower gorge follows the same marked trail that we first met above the falls. It is moderately rugged in places with a steep climb at the end.

We meet our food drop at the Twin Falls car and camp below Twin Falls in an area where swimming is neither safe nor permitted. Here are two quotes to explain why swimming here and up Twin Falls Gorge is no longer permitted. The first is from a statement by the Aboriginal traditional owners of the area. The second is from a press release from Kakadu Board of Management.

“For many years we have been worried about tourists on our country. We worry about tourists being injured or killed by accidents or *ginga* (estuarine crocodile). We are also worried about how tourists treat our country. All through the Twin Falls area there are many special places that are sacred to us. *Bininj* don't swim in the plunge pools. *Bininj* behave quietly and respectfully at these places. ... For many years we have wanted to close Twin Falls altogether but have instead kept it open hoping to find better and safer ways for tourists to visit. We want tourists to keep coming to Twin Falls but not to swim.”

“The Kakadu Board of Management has decided that swimming is no longer an appropriate use of the area considering the risk to visitor safety, competing resource allocation needs, impacts on wildlife and the significance of Twin Falls.”

If we arrive early enough, it may be possible to take a boat up the gorge and visit the base of the falls with an Aboriginal guide. There will be an extra charge for this.

We may now have a day at our disposal. If so, you will have the choice of relaxing at the camp or doing a day-walk to Jim Jim Falls. Jim Jim is the highest waterfall in Kakadu, over 200 metres in total with a final drop of about 160 metres.

Maps. El Sherana (1st 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: July 22-31

The first day of this section is the longest of the entire trip as we make our way across the plains and climb up the escarpment to enjoy the views and pools at Surprise Falls. Those who are doing only this section need to be prepared for an exceptionally strenuous first day. Those doing the full trip will have had ample time to get used to carrying their packs.

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.

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.

Next, we visit Gronophylum 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 walking three kilometres might take you three days.

From Gronophylum, 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.

From this area, another climb takes us down past more Aboriginal art and onto the plain above Gunlom (UDP) 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 look out over the plains below — and the road which will lead us back to Darwin.

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

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Although late July - early August is one of the coolest parts of the year, the maximum temperature on most days will still average 30-32°C. Although the average nightly minimum is about 16-18°C (65°F), it is not uncommon for the temperature to drop as low as 10°C (50°F). Occasionally it goes lower still. Sleeping bags are essential. Rain is highly unlikely.

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. 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 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.
- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer. Section two rates as level four because of the long first day. Those who have already done section one seldom find it particularly difficult.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 2-3. You need to carry 6 days food on section one and 8 on section two. This will include about 2-3½ kg of the evening meals. 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 excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
- Swims** Most creeks are still flowing well and the swimming is excellent. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
- Lowlights** The long walk between Twin Falls Creek and Surprise Falls. Possible tourist crowds at Jim Jim and/or Twin Falls.
- Highlights** 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.
- Fishing** Not permitted on this walk.
- Maps** To get a better idea where this walk goes see the links below.
The Top End showing Kakadu in relation to Darwin: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/images/maps/te_map.gif
Kakadu National Park: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/images/maps/kdu_map.jpg
Kakadu Circle routes: www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/images/maps/kakadu_circles_map1.jpg

Notes

Those doing the full trip will have to carry only what they need for the first section. Additional food and other items for the second section can be left in a package which will be brought out with the food drop.

The vehicle which is scheduled to bring in the food drop is likely to be part of another tour and may not be returning to Darwin before this trip ends. It is unlikely to be possible to send anything back to Darwin at the end of the first section and have it waiting for you when you return. If you think you might want to send something back, you **must** confirm that this will be possible prior to departure.

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.

The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas.

Notes for those doing only one section

Those doing only section two will need to be prepared for a hard first day walking. Those doing the full trip will have had plenty of time to get used to the walking.

Coinda 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 Coinda 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 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.

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: Kakadu Circle No. 3

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Koolpin to Twin

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 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 alternate arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc. Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Walk to Twin Falls. Those finishing here will be driven to Cooina or Darwin in the late afternoon, their choice. If you would like to experience the Kakadu wetlands, we recommend booking a budget room at Cooina and doing the Yellow Waters cruise the following morning. We cannot take more than six people back to Darwin. If you want a ride back, please let us know well in advance, first come, first served.

Section 2 Twin to Gunlom

Day 7 We can take up to six people out to Kakadu in the vehicle which brings out the food drop. If more than six are joining the trip, some of them will have to catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina. See the note below for details. If you go out a day early, this gives you a chance to experience the Kakadu wetlands with a Yellow Waters Cruise. There is only one bus per day. Check the current timetable when you book. The cost of the bus is not included in the cost of the tour. If you take the bus, wait in the open air pub and meet our vehicle there. If there are more than six people joining the trip, the vehicle will have to come from Darwin, drive to Twin Falls and return to Cooina to collect some of the group. This can make the pick up quite late. Food drop meal, bush camp.

Day 8-15 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 16 Return to vehicles. Drive to Darwin via Pine Creek. Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon.

Note **Cooina Bus.** The cost of getting to or from Cooina is not included in the cost of the tour for those who cannot go in our food drop vehicle. Greyhound ran a scheduled service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to Cooina at the time these notes were written. Check the current timetable when you book. If you can't make the connection to Cooina with Greyhound, you should be able to book a seat on a tour bus. The three companies to try are: Top End Escapes (1300 736 892), AAT Kings (08 8923 6555) and APT (08 8984 2999).