

Kakadu Highlights No. 1: January 7-20, 2018

Section 1: Barramundi and Waterfall Creeks: January 7-14

We may do a loop walk up and back from Maguk or we may do a through walk beginning at the bridge over the South Alligator near Gunlom and finishing at Maguk. We may not know which we will do until shortly before departure. The following description is based on the through walk.



Plateau termite mound

The drive from Coinda to the South Alligator bridge is about 150 km, the last 30 of which is on gravel. Beyond this point, the road is closed so we have a somewhat tedious walk along the road to the Gunlom campground. Great views but at this time of year, large crocodiles could be there so we climb to the top where we can finally enjoy a safe swim. With no one else in the area, we can camp as near to the top of the falls as we'd like.

From the top of the falls, it's only four kilometres us to the end of a rocky section after which it flattens out.

Another six kilometres across a flat plain to the base of the next escarpment. Along the way, we pass the largest termite mounds we have found anywhere on the plateau. Here we find a good pool and a possible campsite.

We may stop here or we may move to first level above where we find some good views, a fascinating swim-through cave and pockets of monsoon forest where you can experience a very different environment.



Exploring the cave.

Everyone who has been through the cave has thought it was an amazing experience. We've even had people come back just so they could do it again. This, however, the wet season. It would be a disaster to get caught in a flash flood so if it looks as if there is any chance of rain in the next hour, we'll have to give it a miss.

The climb to the top of the ridge separating Waterfall and Barramundi Creeks the following morning is the most strenuous of the trip.

However, we have all day to go about two km, so there is no need to push. Along the way, we find interesting rock forms, more monsoon forest and some of the best ridgetop views in Kakadu.



Gunlom as the dry season visitors never see it



On the first level above the plateau



View from the high point between Waterfall and Barramundi Creeks



Big pool at upper Barramundi. We camp under some huge shady *Allosyncarpia* trees near the pool.

We finish the day's walk with the descent into Barramundi Valley and a one kilometre walk to a large pool surrounded by huge, shady trees, a great campsite, so nice that we might choose to remain for two nights.

But there's still more to come. A relatively short walk the following day brings us to another one of the Barramundi tributaries, more beautiful pools, waterfalls and our campsite. The two photos below right show you just how different it looks in the Wet and Dry.

From here we walk down to the upper Barramundi Gorge for a final swim. As wandering crocodiles mean it is not safe to cross Barramundi Creek below the falls at this time of year, we cut cross country on the wet season route before dropping down to meet the vehicle track. We meet our vehicle at a locked gate about 5 kilometres in from the main road.



Barramundi side falls, January. The red x shows where the people in the August photo were standing.



Same waterfall as left, August.

We then drive to Cooina where we visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre before doing the late afternoon Yellow Waters cruise.



Yellow Waters cruise. In the dry season, every seat would be full.

We spend the night in accommodation at Cooina. The next morning, if the special offer is still in place, we do the early Yellow Waters Cruise. This is the best way to experience Kakadu's wetlands – great to look at but not the best place for a bushwalk.

Maps: 1:50 000 Goodparla or 1:100 000 Mundogie. The 1:250 000 Kakadu map shows the whole park but is not suitable for navigation.

Section 2: Baroalba Creek: January 13-20

The section overlaps the first. It includes the Yellow Waters cruise and accommodation.

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 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 as will be the case on this trip.



Baroalba camp, February 2012. Our group fly allows us to cook and eat comfortably even when it's raining.



Baroalba swim stop.

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.

You are likely to see more Aboriginal art in more different styles than on any of our other trips of a similar length. In deference to the wishes of the traditional owners, we have not included any art site photos in these notes.



Leichhardt grasshoppers, known to the local people as Alyurr (children of the lightning man, Namarrgon) are only seen during the Build Up and Wet seasons.

The walk starts with an easy three kilometre stroll along an old four wheel drive track to Gubara (Baroalba Springs) where we can enjoy a refreshing swim. From here, we leave all tracks behind, beginning a somewhat strenuous scramble up a 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.

The next few days are spent slowly working our way upstream, exploring the many wonderful rock shelters, art sites and pools. Some of the walking will be done with daypacks from base camps.

Sunrise and sunset from the Baroalba high points are among the nicest views in Kakadu. We may decide to carry water up and spend one or two nights camped on high points. We return via a slightly different route to the track we walked along on the first day.

Map. 1:50 000 Nourlangie Creek or 1:100 000 Cahill. (The Cahill map is a much older map than Nourlangie Creek.)

Notes for section 2. You need to be prepared to carry up to six litres of water if we do a high point camp. Water containers can be filled just prior to the climbs so they will not have to be carried for more than about two hours. Wine bladders weigh little and make good collapsible water containers.

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

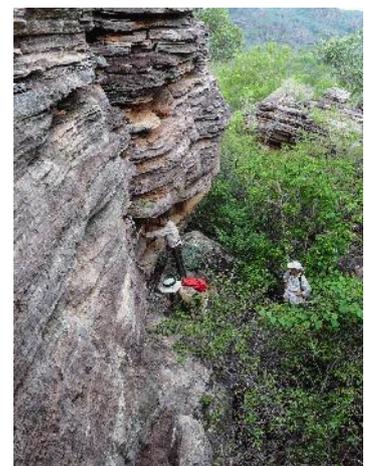
If you meet us in Kakadu, you will have to purchase a park entrance ticket on your way into the park. Our guide(s) should reimburse you automatically. Please remind them if this is not done soon after you meet.



Cascades, upper Baroalba.



Baroalba cascades spa, February 2011.



Climbing to a Baroalba high point, late December 2008.



On a highpoint after the climb above.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

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 33-34°C (91-94°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 Level 3.

Section 1. Whether we do a loop or through walk, the beginning follows a 4WD track. This is followed by a steep climb, on a marked trail at Gunlom, with no track at Maguk.

Most of the walk is relatively flat but there are a few steep climbs, all of which are less than 200 metres. 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.

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. Camping, however, is not permitted in the shelters.

If we camp on a high point, 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 unless they are certain we will not be going to one of the high points.*

Both sections. 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 in some areas..

Very little 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.



Baroalba wade, February 2011. This is the wet season. While your feet will be wet most of the time, they will not be cold.

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.



Wild tomato flower. The wet and very early dry season is the best time for wildflowers.

The spear grass normally reaches its peak in March, often three or four metres tall in some areas (much shorter in others). We may encounter short sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass during some portion of the trip, but this early it is unlikely that there will be much.

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 3. You need to carry a week's food. This will include about 2½-3½ kg of the evening meals. You do not need a sleeping bag but you do need a tent and fly.

Art Minor sites on section one. Section two includes some of the best in Kakadu.

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 Kakadu's waterfalls. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot. You will definitely have to float your pack across one or more flooded creeks. If you can't swim at least 100 m unaided, do not do this trip.

Lowlights Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying a week's food.

Highlights Wet season waterfalls. Great swimming. 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. 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 — both sections.

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

Rain is very likely at this time of year. It is very important that you pack well enough so that you can keep most things in your pack dry, even if you have to pack a wet tent or other wet items. A pack liner is essential at this time of year. Garbages are not satisfactory.

It is a good idea to have a change of clothes for the night at Cooina.

The Cooina store has a limited selection of foods. If you want anything even slightly out of the ordinary, plan to bring it with you from the start.

Extreme wet season rains can close roads and cause delays. This is not likely but you need to be aware that it can happen.

Those doing both sections of the trip will have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

You should keep a water bottle, your lunch and some money with you in the car during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack before the end of the journey.

The cost of the accommodation between sections is included in the price for those doing either section.

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. The nature walk is generally under water at this time of year.

Both the cultural centre and the shop 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 Highlights No. 1

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 All itineraries may be subject to change.

Section 1 Waterfall and Barramundi Creeks

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 other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street.

Drive to Kakadu via Pine Creek. 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 some days, day packs others.

Day 7 Return to vehicle, drive to Cooinda, afternoon cruise.

Day 8 Possible morning cruise before driving to Baroalba Creek. Those finishing here catch a bus back to Darwin. See Day 7 below for information about the buses.

Section 2 Baroalba Creek

Day 7 Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooinda early in the morning. The cost of getting to Cooinda is not included in the cost of the tour. AAT Kings (08 8923 6555) run daily tours to Cooinda. They will normally sell seats just for the ride. This is the only public transport that we are aware of.

On arrival, you can wait at the shop and meet the group when they arrive for the afternoon cruise. Or, make your own way to the cruise and meet them there. Due to the fact that the members of the group are finishing a walk that morning, we cannot be more specific about the arrival time than to say it will be about lunch time.

Make sure you bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks.

Drive to Jabiru. Overnight at Kakadu Lodge.

Day 8 Drive to Baroalba car park. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 9–13 Bush camping, carrying full packs every day.

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