

Kakadu Highlights No. 5: July 10-23, 2011

Note: To fit in with a group who are doing the Jatbula Trail immediately before this trip, we have changed the order of the sections.

Section 1: Gunlom-Barramundi: July 10-17

Gunlom (UDP) Falls is about 300 kilometres from Darwin. We will meet a number of those joining the trip at Pine Creek on the way. Gunlom is a beautiful spot, the location of the waterfall scene in the original Crocodile Dundee movie. Gunlom is extremely popular and has been developed for intensive day use so, after a brief look and a swim in the plunge pool, we shoulder our packs and move up Waterfall Creek and into the wilderness where we will spend the week.

A short steep climb takes us to the top of the falls and more pools, less crowded than the one below, a good excuse for another swim. Another four kilometres brings us to the end of a rocky section and a number of good pools, next to one of which we will probably make our first camp.

The following day, we walk another six kilometres across a flat plain to the base of the next escarpment where we find a good pool and a possible campsite. However, unless we have been moving exceptionally slowly, we move up to the first level above where we find some good views, an interesting little cave and pockets of monsoon forest where you can experience a very different environment.

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. 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.

A relatively short walk the following day brings us to another one of the Barramundi tributaries, more beautiful pools, waterfalls and our campsite. An easy walk on the final day brings us into the upper Barramundi Gorge with yet more pools and a bit of Aboriginal art. A short walk on the final day brings us to the vehicle track where we meet our transport for the ride to Cooina where we meet anyone joining the trip for the second section. The afternoon is spent doing a short walk with a traditional Aboriginal elder or, if she is not available, visiting some of the better known places like Nourlangie Rock or relaxing or whatever the group wishes. The day finishes with a bistro meal at the resort and a night in budget accommodation. This section finishes with the 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise the following morning. The cruise gives you the opportunity to see the wetlands wildlife at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. The early hour ensures you see more of the wildlife than those who do the midday cruises.

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.

Terrain and difficulty (see also the comments for both sections)

Overall Level 3

Terrain Level 3. Most of the walk is fairly flat and relatively easy. However, there is some rock hopping and a couple of fairly strenuous climbs. One climb might require using your hands to hold on as you climb up or down. We have allowed two more days than we would allow for most groups to give those taking part extra time for rest stops, swimming and looking around.

Highlights The cave at the headwaters of Waterfall Creek

Notes on section 1.

Doing the walk as described requires a vehicle shuffle at the start. This is practical only if we have a third vehicle and extra drivers to do the car shuffle. If we can't do the through walk, we will do a loop, back through a saddle, across a plain to rejoin Waterfall Creek near our first camp site.

Section 2: Twin Falls to Jim Jim Falls: July 16-23

This section overlaps the first and includes the walk with the Aboriginal traditional owner, a night at Cooina and Yellow Waters cruise. After the cruise we bid farewell to anyone not continuing and drive to the Twin Falls car park. The drive is less than 100 kilometres but may take up to two hours depending on the condition of the gravel road and 4WD tracks. We will need to do a car shuffle to leave one vehicle at the end of the walk. This normally takes 1 to 1½ hours.

If possible, we will climb up and camp at the top of Twin Falls as the camp below Twin Falls is in an area where swimming is neither safe nor permitted. The walk to the top follows a marked trail up a fairly steep hill, through an interesting sandstone maze and out to the creek above Twin Falls. We must stay on this trail until we leave the restricted area about two km above the 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.

After a look around the top of Twin Falls, we put on our packs and continue to the end of the marked trail where we leave all signs of civilisation behind as we make our way upstream, exploring and enjoying the shady rock ledges, sandy beaches and cool pools that we find in the seven kilometre long upper gorge.

The day we leave Twin Falls Creek is the tough one. We head overland to the top of a rainforest filled gorge through some very rugged and broken sandstone country — so rugged that no two groups have ever picked the exact same route. Depending on which route is chosen and how much time we spend working our way through the sandstone maze, we may camp on one of the creeks we cross en route or we may reach the gorge.

The camp site on the flat rock ledges at the top of the rainforest gorge is magnificent. Beautiful waterfalls cascade through a series of inviting pools under a shady rainforest canopy. If time permits, we will spend at least half a day here before pushing on across the plateau to Jim Jim Creek. A lack of landmarks along the way means that we never take the exact same route. A lack of water means that we must reach the pools on Jim Jim Creek that day.

The area near Jim Jim Creek is fairly flat so the walking is relatively easy as we move downstream toward the falls, stopping to examine some Aboriginal art and cool off with a swim or two along the way. From the top of Jim Jim Falls, over 200 metres from top to bottom with a final sheer drop of 160 metres, we enjoy spectacular views down the gorge and across the plains to the distant escarpment on the horizon. If time permits, we climb down to the top of the main drop so that we can enjoy another pool and experience what it feels like to look over a sheer 160 metre drop.

On the final morning we follow the marked trail down to the bottom of the gorge below the falls. After one last swim, we return to the vehicles on the morning of the last full day and

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Terrain and difficulty (see also the comments for both sections)

Overall Level 4

Terrain Level 4. Short sharp climbs at the beginning and end, both on well defined walking tracks. Fairly flat and reasonably easy along Twin Falls and Jim Jim Creeks. Similarly flat and relatively easy between the top of Rainforest Gorge and Jim Jim Creek. Some of the terrain between Twin Falls Creek and Rainforest Gorge is as broken stone country, **as rugged as anything we encounter on any of our walks**. A difference of 100 metres at one point can mean a difference of two or three hours walking time. It is this day that gives the trip its level 4 rating.

Highlights The rock maze between Twin Falls Creek and the Rainforest Gorge.

Lowlights The rock maze between Twin Falls Creek and the Rainforest Gorge. (This can be a highlight for some and a lowlight for others.)

Notes on Section 2.

This walk may be done in the reverse direction. If exceptionally late rain keeps the Twin Falls track closed, we will have to do a complete loop, beginning and ending at Jim Jim.

Terrain and Difficulty General for both sections

Climate Level 2. Although June-July is the coolest time of the year, the maximum temperature on most days will still average 30-31°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 Both sections have a 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 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.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 6 days food on each section. This will include about 2-3 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 on both sections.
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	Possible tourist crowds at Jim Jim, Twin Falls, Gunlom and/or Barramundi.
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. 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 on both sections

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.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives. It is unlikely that you will be able to easily get things out of your pack during the day.

A daypack might be useful on one or both sections.

If you are meeting 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.

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

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 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 afternoon.

The cultural centre and the hotel sell a variety of souvenirs. 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 buy there.

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 5

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Waterfall - Barramundi

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 7 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 the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Return to vehicles. Drive to Cooina, arriving about lunch time. Visit Nourlangie Rock if time permits. Book into budget accommodation. Opportunity to wash clothes and have hot shower. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Bistro meal at the pub.

Day 8 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. End of section one. Those finishing here catch a bus back to Darwin. See Day 7 below for information about the buses..

Section 2 Twin to Jim Jim

Day 7 Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina early in the morning. The cost of getting to Cooina is not included in the cost of the tour. Greyhound ran a scheduled service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the time these notes were written. Check the current timetable when you book. If you can't make the connection with Greyhound, you should be able to book a seat on a tour bus. The two companies to try are: AAT Kings (08 8923 6555) and APT (08 8984 2999). On arrival, you can wait in the open air pub and meet the group there or check into budget accommodation saying that you are part of the Willis's Walkabouts group. 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.

Day 8 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. Drive to Twin or Jim Jim Falls. 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.