

Kakadu Highlights No. 6: July 29 - August 11, 2012

Section 1: Graveside Area: July 29 - August 5

This walk takes you into the greatest concentration of permanently flowing creeks we have yet found in Kakadu. You see a variety of landscapes, deep gorges, beautiful swimming pools and cascades as well as a number of little known Aboriginal art sites.

The 350+ kilometre drive from Darwin takes most of the day as the final 45 kilometres is on a 4WD track which is so rough that it can take over two hours on its own. From the parking area, a relatively easy three kilometre walk across some fairly flat ground brings us to a lovely pool and our first camp site.

During the next five days, we visit Graveside Gorge, Cascades Creek and, if time permits, Gronophylum Creek.

The two main gorges at Graveside contain some of the nicest monsoon forest in Kakadu. We usually spend most of a day exploring the gorges, enjoying the shade and relaxing in and around the large pools.

Cascades Creek is noted for its many pools, cascades and Aboriginal art sites. It is so pleasant that our trip up or down the four kilometre gorge normally takes a full day. The last 500 metres alone 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.

The loop which joins the two creeks takes us through the open woodland of the plateau and through tall paperbarks and other trees which line the creek that drains the main valley.

We may also 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 you with an incredible panorama. Following the creek, you might walk three kilometres in an hour. Following a compass bearing, the landscape is such a jumble of broken rock that the same three kilometres might take you several days.

We return to the vehicles on the morning of the last full day and drive out to Cooina to meet those who are 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 Koolpin or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section three)

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| Overall | Level 3. |
| Terrain | Level 3. The terrain ranges from open woodland to narrow rainforest gorges. Parts are flat and easy. Other parts require scrambling over river stones of a variety of sizes. There are a few steep, but short climbs. You walk through almost every type of terrain that it is possible to find in Kakadu. |
| Vegetation | Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creeks. Some short sections of thick scrub along Cascades Creek |
| Hours | 4-6 hours most days. |
| Packs | Pack weight - level 2-3. You need to carry six days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent. |
| Art | There are a number of interesting art sites along this route. |
| Campsites | Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have most or all of them to ourselves. |

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| Swims | Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along all creeks. |
| Lowlights | Long, rough 4WD drive at the beginning and end. . |
| Highlights | The magical cascades and waterslide on Cascades Creek. Spectacular Graveside Gorge. |

Note for section 1. Many groups begin with Cascades Creek and finish with Graveside Gorge. The guide will decide which to visit first based on the conditions at the time.

Section 2: Twin Falls Creek: August 4-7

This is one of the easiest walks we offer, minimal pack carrying combined with day walks and swim stops along one of the most scenic creeks in Kakadu.

This section overlaps the first and includes the barbecue meal, night at Cooina and Yellow Waters cruise. If seats are available, it may also include the trip to Nourlangie Rock. If seats are limited, those who have done the first section have priority. After the curise, we drive to Twin Falls where we should arrive early enough so that those who wish to do can 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 that, 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 goes up a fairly steep hill, through an interesting sandstone maze and out to the creek above Twin Falls.

Once at the top of the falls, we stop, have a break and take time to enjoy the views before we head upstream to the campsite where we will spend the next two nights. We spend the rest of the day and the following one exploring and enjoying the shady rock ledges, sandy beaches and cool pools that we find in the seven kilometre long upper gorge. This section finishes with the climb back down to the vehicle and the drive to Jim Jim.

If no one is leaving or joining at this point, we will move straight to Jim Jim without going to Cooina. If the guide does go to Cooina to drop someone off or pick someone up, those continuing on to section three will have the option of remaining at Jim Jim Gorge.

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

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section three)

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| Overall | Level 1 |
| Terrain | Level 1. The climb to the top of Twin Falls is steep but straightforward along a well defined track. The walk along Twin Falls Creek is mostly flat and easy with a minimal amount of rock hopping. This is one of the easiest walks we offer. |
| Vegetation | Level 1-2. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek. |
| Hours | You carry your full pack for only 1-2 hours on the way up and again on the way back. Day walk will be fairly long. |
| Packs | Pack weight - level 1. You need to carry only 2 days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent. |
| Art | We may visit a couple of minor sites on this walk. |
| Campsites | Sand or rock ledges. Excellent site near the water. We should have it to ourselves. |
| Swims | Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along the creek. |
| Lowlights | The very long drive to the start of the walk. Possible tourist crowds at Twin Falls. |
| Highlights | View from the top of Twin Falls. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Light packs. |

Section 3: Jim Jim and Rainforest Gorge: August 7-11

The drive from Cooinda to Jim Jim is less than 100 kilometres but may take more than two hours due to the rough nature of the final ten kilometres of the track. After a swim at Jim Jim Creek, we begin the four kilometre walk to the entrance to the one of the longest rainforest gorges in Kakadu. Although it is much smaller than nearby Jim Jim and Twin Falls Creeks, the creek which created this gorge continues to flow long after its neighbours have stopped.

As camping is not permitted in Rainforest Gorge, known as Anbadgoran to the local Aboriginal people, we normally camp at the base of the gorge. The walk up the gorge is only six kilometres long but it is strenuous — a continuous scramble over boulders and rocks of all sizes. However, it is very shady and the gorge contains several good pools where we can stop for a swim so we normally take a full day for the walk. However, if the drive to Cooinda proves unnecessary, we may decide to do the walk to the top of the gorge on the first day.

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.

Once at Jim Jim, we have a choice. We may decide to head upstream to get further from the marked trail or we may camp near where we hit the creek. Whichever we choose, the area near Jim Jim Creek is fairly flat so the walking is relatively easy. If time permits, we will spend a day walking upstream to the monoliths, four large rock pillars on the edge of a large pool. Along the way, we stop to examine some Aboriginal art and cool off with a swim or two along the way.

We then head back downstream to 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 climb into the vehicles for the drive back to Darwin.

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

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section three)

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| Overall | Level 3. |
| Terrain | Level 3-4. Most of the walk is relatively flat and fairly easy. There is a steep part along a marked track to Jim Jim Creek below the falls. The walk up or down the rainforest gorge requires a lot of rock hopping and scrambling over boulders the size of small trucks. It is quite strenuous. Some of our clients who had never walked in this kind of terrain considered it to be one of the most physically demanding things they had ever done. |
| Vegetation | Level 2-3. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek. Dense forest in Rainforest Gorge makes for slow going. |
| Hours | 4-6 hours most days. |
| Packs | Pack weight - level 2. You need to carry four days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent. |
| Art | There is one major site that most groups visit as well as several minor sites we might see. |
| Campsites | Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have them to ourselves. |
| Swims | Swimming is excellent. Good pools all along both creeks. |
| Lowlights | Possible tourist crowds at Jim Jim. |
| Highlights | The view at the top of Jim Jim Falls. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Rainforest Gorge and Falls. |

Note for section 3. Some groups do the walk in the reverse direction, Jim Jim Creek followed by Rainforest Gorge. The walk up the rainforest gorge is so strenuous that some groups choose to miss the walk up the gorge and walk over and back from Jim Jim Creek. This drops the walk to level 2.

General Terrain and Difficulty for all sections

- Terrain** Little or 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 more than if you do not. The relatively easy nature of sections one and two and the gradual build up of bushwalking fitness that comes with them means that section three would be rated as only level three for those who have already done the first two sections.
- Climate** Level 3. The average maximum temperature is 32-33°C. And the average nightly minimum is about 16-17°C. It is, however, 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.
- 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 all sections

Those doing more than one section 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 have your lunch, a water bottle, and some money with you in the vehicle during the drives as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the journey.

A day pack may be useful on sections one and two.

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

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 crocodiles and birds) 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 Highlights No. 6

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Graveside Area

- 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 the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell St. Drive to Kakadu. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.
- Day 2-6** Bush camping, carrying full packs every day.
- 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 ending here catch a bus back to Darwin. See the note at the end of the itinerary for details.

Section 2 Twin Falls Creek

- Day 7** Those beginning with this section catch a bus to Cooina. See the note at the end of the itinerary.
On arrival, wait in the open air pub and meet the guide (and group) there about lunch time. 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.
- Day 8** 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. Drive to Twin Falls. Possible boat trip. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.
- Day 9** Day walk, upper Twin Falls Gorge
- Day 10** Return to vehicle and drive to Jim Jim. If anyone is ending here, the guide will drive them back to Cooina.

Section 3 Jim Jim and the Rainforest Gorge

- Day 10** Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina to meet the guide who will then drive them to the start of the walk. If no one is joining or leaving, we go straight to Jim Jim. Begin the walk, carrying full packs.
- Day 11-13** Bush camps, carrying full packs every day.
- Day 14** Return to vehicle. Drive to Darwin. 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. 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).