

Kakadu Super Circle No. 1: Jan 8-28, 2017

Update 10 Nov 2016

This is the only tour where you get to visit Jim Jim Falls during the wet season. Other tours can fly you past, but no one else can bring you up close where you can experience their awesome wet season power.

It is absolutely essential that anyone considering this trip reads these notes and our three Wet Season web pages beginning with www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml

Our walk begins at the South Alligator bridge in the southern part of Kakadu, about 330 kilometres and four to five hours from Darwin. Beyond this point, all roads are closed so we have the next three weeks to ourselves.



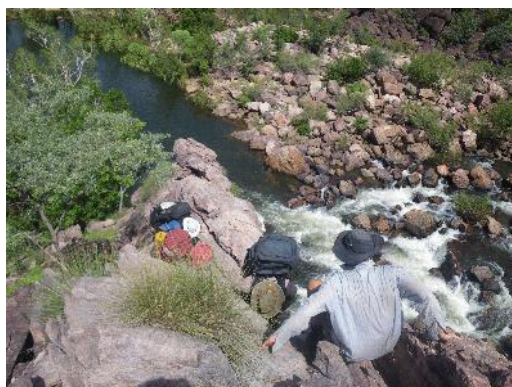
Guide Don Butcher and Val Heywood at Twin Falls, January 2009



Crossing the Koolpin bridge.

A relatively flat seven kilometre walk along the gravel road brings us back to the South Alligator at Flying Fox crossing. We leave the road and follow the river upstream to the junction with Koolpin Creek. We follow Koolpin to the remains of an old bridge. Large crocodiles move around during the Wet, so we must cross the bridge – it is unsafe to swim anywhere below the escarpment. As you can see in the photo at left, some are happy to walk across while others sit down and inch their way. It may be slow, but we have been crossing the bridge for more than 25 years and have never had anyone fall in.

Once across the bridge, an easy eight km across country or along the dry season track brings us to Koolpin Gorge or Jarrangbarnmi, as it is called in the local Jawoyn language. A short,



Going up the ridge.



Climbing down the ridge.

steep climb over a ridge brings us above the first waterfall and out of range of the estuarine crocs that were a potential problem below.

The two photos above were taken at the steep climb mentioned above. Some of the stronger walkers went slightly ahead and grabbed the packs as they were passed down. They then helped those who were less confident at the climb. This climb is unavoidable at this time of year.

From this point onwards, swimming is no longer a problem – it's pure pleasure. Better still, you have finished the most difficult of the climbs on the entire trip.

Koolpin Gorge is beautiful. In January, the waterfalls are spectacular. The pools are perfect for swimming. The views are 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 a full day to reach the top, camping on a sandy beach next to a lovely waterhole.

From the top of the gorge we take a short cut across the plain and through the first of two low passes. Just before the second, there is a sudden change in vegetation as we enter a monsoon rainforest.

Generally restricted to small gorges such as the one through which we are passing, these forests offer deep shade and a flora totally different to that of the open plains.

Our path now takes us toward Twin Falls Creek where we turn and head upstream, bound for one of the most interesting and least known parts of the park. The plateau is a mixture of sandy flats and broken rock outcrops, many of which hide major Aboriginal art sites. No group can possibly visit them all but all groups visit a good selection. Some shelters contain only a few paintings, others contain dozens. Picture yourself sitting in a shelter, studying the art then turning around to watch the rain come down, imagining how it must have been for those who called this region home for so many thousands of years.



Upper Koolpin Gorge campsite

At this time of year all of the smaller creeks and waterfalls should be flowing. We take the time and stop to explore some of these. As we travel, we notice dramatic changes in the landscape. Small and scrubby vegetation in one location, towering paperbarks in another. Flat plains here and rocky outcrops of all shapes and sizes there.

And, of course, there are the swims. Every day we find more beautiful pools that seem to demand that



Guide Russell Willis at upper Twin cascades, January 2010

we stop for yet another dip – little pools, big pools and everything in between. The swims are one of the main reasons a trip like this is so enjoyable.

If time permits, our final night on Twin Falls Creek is spent at a set of cascades stretching over a kilometre. During the dry season, all you would see would be a few still pools. During the wet season, they will be covered in water, a magnificent sight.

From the cascades, or, if we have been moving relatively slowly, a point further down Twin Falls Creek, we cross over to the upper reaches of Jim Jim Creek. Since lack of water will not be a problem, we can skirt some extremely rocky and scrubby country and make our way along the edge of the rough area, visiting a few art sites as we go.

We reach Jim Jim Creek and the first of many inviting pools about two and a half days upstream from the falls. The walk along Jim Jim Creek is generally flat and easy, with numerous stops for swims and visits to Aboriginal art sites. One of the highlights is the Jim Jim monoliths, four massive rock pillars which, at this time of year, may be entirely surrounded by water.

Jim Jim Falls is the highest waterfall in Kakadu, 200 metres overall, with a final sheer drop of 160 metres. With Jim Jim in flood, the view from the top is awesome. The photos at the top of the next page show you what you will see compared to what people see in the dry season.



Swimming at the Jim Jim monoliths

From the top of the falls, we backtrack slightly and cross to Anbadgoran or the Rainforest Gorge. From there we cross to the Amphitheatre Falls on Twin Falls Creek where we will meet a helicopter with our food drop.

It will contain the food for the evening meals for the rest of the trip as well as your breakfasts and lunches. Rubbish accumulated to this point can be sent out in the helicopter. It is not possible for people to join at this point. People can leave only if they are physically unable to continue.



Jim Jim Falls, July 2007



Jim Jim Falls, January 2009



Amphitheatre Falls from the air, January 2009

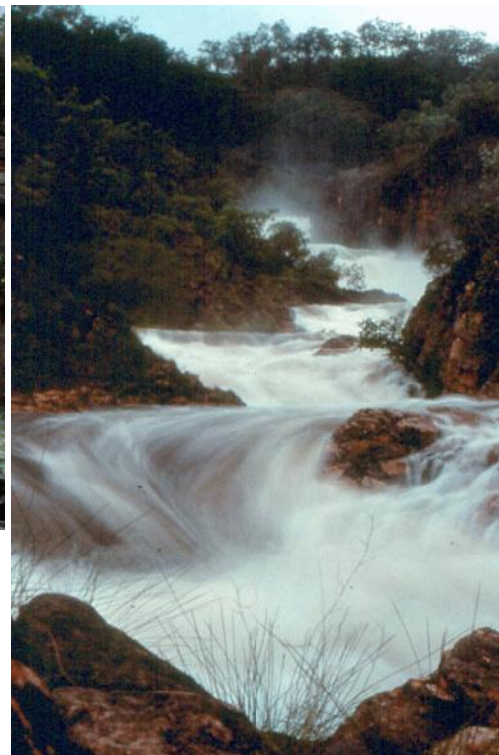
If we have been moving very quickly and water levels permit it, it may be possible to walk down to Twin Falls for the day.

Due to the potential danger of large crocodiles below the escarpment, we are no longer permitted to cross the plain below the escarpment. This means that we will have to follow a different route back to the upper reaches of Koolpin Creek. Depending on how fast we are moving, we may cross to the top of Graveside where a twin waterfall drops 100 metres into a pool in the gorge below or we may cross directly to the upper reaches of Cascades Creek.

During the dry season, we can easily walk down Cascades Creek Gorge. At this time of year, the first part is likely to be impassable but we may be able to drop down into the lower part of the gorge. If the creek is in full flood, we have to contour along the top for the full distance.



Cascades, normal wet season flow, 2009



Cascades in full flood, 1989

The cascades for which the creek is named consist of a series of pools and drops which can turn into a single mass of white water after a storm. The photos above and right were both taken in the wet season.

Next, if time permits, we move across the valley to Gronophylum Creek with its unusual multi-trunked palms. 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.

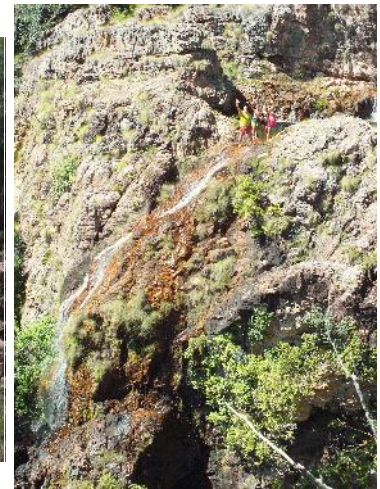
When Gronophylum is in flood, the walk along the creek is considerably more difficult than it is during the dry season. We may choose to omit the lower portion of Gronophylum and take a short cut up the main Graveside valley.

From Gronophylum, we head overland to Barramundi with its many waterfalls. We have a choice of several routes. Our choice will be determined by the amount of time we have left and by the water levels at the time. We finish with a walk along the Maguk 4WD track (closed at this time of year) out to the main road and our pickup.

We then drive to Cooinda and the Kakadu wetlands, a very different environment to that through which we have been walking. The wetlands are flat and full of mosquitoes, not the best place for a bushwalk. However, they are also full of wildlife. The cruise



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



Same waterfall as left, August.

on Yellow Waters allows us to see the wetlands wildlife at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. So that we can get to Jabiru at a reasonable hour, we will aim to do the 1:15 pm cruise. This allows you to see just how different the wetlands look when they are in full flood.

Our Yellow Waters gallery, <http://www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/galleries/oldsite/yellowgal.shtml> has photos from both the wet and dry seasons. In the wet, we have plenty of space on the boat.

The day finishes with a drive to Jabiru for a final night in the bush. Early the following morning, we board the vehicle for Darwin and the airport, ready for the flight home.

For those who have a spirit of adventure and possess the needed fitness, this will be an exciting experience, remembered for a lifetime.

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana (First few km to Koolpin Gorge), Koolpin, Jim Jim Falls & Goodparla or 1:100 000 Stow (1st few km to Koolpin Gorge), Jim Jim & Mundogie. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas but is not detailed enough for accurate navigation.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 5

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 as happened in 2016. There will be many opportunities to swim and cool off, but you must be prepared for hot, humid conditions.

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.

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.

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 on some days.

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.

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.



One of our many swim stops



Floating pack using pack cover



Walking through the grass. The Wet is sometimes referred to as the 'green season'.

Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 10-11 days 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 with a fly.
Art	We visit a variety of art sites.
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 the route..
Swims	This is the best time to see Kakadu's waterfalls. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying food for 10-11 days.
Highlights	Kakadu's biggest waterfalls seen at their spectacular best. 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 estaurine crocodiles.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Notes

Once you start, you are in it to the finish. The only way out is by an expensive helicopter. When some people felt they couldn't finish the trip in 2016, going out with the food drop helicopter made it cost more than continuing to the end.

To take part you need above average fitness, **the ability to swim at least 100 metres** (there are a number of river crossings which may require floating your pack), a sense of adventure and a desire to see the best that Kakadu has to offer. You do not, however, need to be a superman or superwoman.

The guide is not a trained lifesaver. He or she will be able to swim well enough to cross creeks that are not in full flood but he or she will not be able to give much, if any, assistance to anyone who has exaggerated their swimming ability.

You are probably going to get wet, very wet. This is a wet season trip. On average, it will rain two days in three. The rain will mostly come in short, sharp bursts.

Averages don't tell the full story. You may get less rain; you might encounter a monsoonal depression where it rains for several days in a row. But whatever the case, the rain is warm enough so that it is often more comfortable walking in the rain than when it's not. 2016 was exceptionally dry and hot so it was more difficult than normal. Decent rain makes it easier.

A lightweight umbrella can be useful as shown in the photo.



In the most extreme case, we may simply have to stay in one place for [Walking in the rain](#) a few days and wait for the rivers to go down. This happened on one trip back in the 1990s.



[Campsite with group fly at left](#)

We carry a group fly which we put up at most campsites. If it is raining when it is time to make or break camp and you have a free standing tent, you can put it up and take it down under the fly minimising the amount of water which gets in. The fly also allows us to have dinner together if it happens to be raining at dinner time.

You need to have a package with your breakfast and lunch for the second half ready to give the guide at the pre-trip meeting. It is unlikely that we will be able to provide refrigeration.

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. On a long trip like this where durability is important, a good pack liner is essential. Garbages will almost inevitably tear and leak. Wet food can rot and leave you with little or nothing to eat during the day.

An airbed is very helpful when you have to float a pack a long distance. For example, one group decided to float packs down the upper gorge above Twin Falls. However, where you have to constantly get in and out of the water, an airbed can be more of a hindrance than a help.

A waterproof pack cover is another good way to float your pack.

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

In deference to the wishes of the local Aboriginal people, we do not publish any photos from the art sites you will see.

The route described in the trip notes is for relatively fast groups and may have to be modified.

The road to Koolpin was washed out by floods in 1997, 1998 and 2001 forcing us to go in and out via Barramundi Creek. As this can add a day or two to the route to Twin Falls Creek, this could mean turning downstream when you reach Twin Falls Creek and missing Jim Jim Falls.

We strongly recommend that anyone interested in this trip have a good look at

- the Kakadu Super Circle No. 1 photo gallery on our website. The pictures there will tell you far more than mere words. www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/ksc1gal.shtml
- Our three **Walking in the Wet** pages beginning with www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/wet.shtml
If you haven't read these pages, you are unlikely to be properly prepared.

Itinerary: Kakadu Super Circle No. 1

- Note 1** Day 0 is the day before departure.
- Note 2** This itinerary is subject to change. Exceptionally severe flooding can cause route changes and could conceivably cause a delay in the return to Darwin. If you can afford the time, try not to book a flight on the day after the trip finishes.
- 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 and the only one with a swimming pool. **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 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 2-19** Bush camps, carrying full packs each day. You normally reach the food drop about day 10. Play it safe and carry food for 11 days before the food drop.
- Day 20** Return to vehicles drive to Cooina. Afternoon cruise. Drive to Jabiru for the final night in Kakadu.
- Day 21** Return to Darwin. Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon.

Final Note **The following was sent to us by Parks Australia when we proposed running this trip again this year. *Italics are our comments.***

- As we currently have no policy on heli-touring in place, the use of a helicopter would be strictly limited to dropping food (no hop-on hop-off option to do just one section of the walk). *As mentioned earlier, people getting evacuated by the food drop helicopter had to pay extra for this.*
- The walk may have to be aborted in case of a severe weather warning. *We are very unlikely to be affected by cyclonic winds but we could get the associated rain. If we have to go in via Maguk, it will make the trip more difficult and may result in cutting something short somewhere.*
- Use of helicopter, food-drop and potential evacuation, to occur at your expense. *When two people found they had seriously overestimated their ability in 2016, it cost them a couple of thousand dollars to get helicoptered out on day 3.*
- *The probable guide, Russell Willis, has done this trip many times. While he remains fit, he is over 70 and not quite as fit as the last time he did it in 2009. No matter who the guide is, don't expect a superfit young person who can carry some of your gear.*

Food drop The things you send in with the food drop can contain a lot more than food. Ten days walking in hot, humid and probably rainy conditions can damage or destroy some things. Things that you don't need can go back with the helicopter and back to Darwin. Here are a few things you might consider including in addition to your food.

- Emergency footwear
- Spare batteries
- Spare clothing
- Extra sunscreen
- Extra insect repellent