

Kakadu Super Circle No. 2: May 30 - June 20, 2010

This is our longest and most ambitious dry season Kakadu expedition. On the trip you see wonderful creeks, gorges and Aboriginal art sites hidden deep within the heart of Kakadu. You experience the best of our Kakadu Circle and Twin to Jim Jim Circle routes as well as the Yellow Waters Cruise through the Kakadu wetlands.

Section 1: Koolpin to Twin via Jim Jim: May 30 - June 10

The walk begins at Flying Fox Crossing on the South Alligator River in southern 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 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 normally take a full day to reach the top.

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. Unlike rainforests elsewhere, they are easy to walk through, even without the aid of a track.

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 Aboriginal art sites. Some shelters contain only a few paintings, others contain dozens. No group can possibly visit them all but all groups visit a good selection.

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 we stop for yet another dip. From Twin Falls Creek, we cross over to the upper reaches of Jim Jim Creek. At this time of year we can avoid some extremely rocky and scrubby country by walking up the dry creek beds or taking a short cut around the entire area.

We reach Jim Jim Creek and the first of many inviting pools about two and a half days upstream from the falls. 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.

After collecting our food drop, we make our way over Twin Falls (often not open to vehicles at this time of year). If time permits, we may follow the marked trail (new in 2004) to the top of the falls. We camp below the gorge in an area where swimming is no longer permitted. Here are two quotes to explain why swimming 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 the road has been opened to vehicles, it may be possible to take a boat up the gorge and visit the base of the falls with an Aboriginal guide. There would be an extra charge for this.

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana (small portion of walk only), Koolpin & Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Stow (small portion of walk only) & Jim Jim.

Section 2: Twin to Gunlom: June 10-20

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 enjoy a view out over the plains below. From Gunlom, we take our bus to Cooina it is a relatively short drive to Cooina. After a cook-your-own barbecue at the pub, we spend the night in budget accommodation, avoiding the mosquitoes which plague the wetlands. Next morning, we do a Yellow Waters cruise and get a good view of the Kakadu wetlands before returning to Darwin. Early the following morning, we board the bus for Darwin and the airport, ready for the flight home.

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls (small portion of walk only), Koolpin & Goodparla or 1:100 000 Jim Jim & Mundogie.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Although June is one of the two coolest months of the year, the maximum temperature on most days will still average 30-31°C. Although the average nightly minimum is reasonably warm at about 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 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. 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 10 days food. This will include about 2½-3½ 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	June is a good month to see Kakadu's waterfalls. Most creeks are still flowing well and the swimming is excellent. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	Carrying food for 11 days. Possible tourist crowds at Jim Jim and/or Twin Falls.
Highlights	Kakadu's biggest waterfalls seen early in the dry season. 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

Carrying food for 10 days makes this a physically demanding trip. It is not, however, an endurance test. Every day you eat some of your food and your pack grows lighter. Somewhat above average fitness is required; super fitness is not. We will travel at a reasonably leisurely pace which allows us to enjoy our surroundings. If you have a spirit of adventure and possess the needed fitness, this trip offers you an intensive Kakadu experience to remember for a lifetime.

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.

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.

You should prepare another package containing a towel and some clean clothes to be brought out with the bus so you can take advantage of the hot showers at Cooina. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks at the pub.

It should be possible to connect with flights leaving Darwin after 1 p.m. on the day the trip finishes.

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.

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

Cooinda and Bowali

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 in the afternoon.

The Bowali Visitor Centre just outside Jabiru has good displays about the natural history of the park. All are worth a visit.

Warradjan, Bowali and the Cooinda hotel all 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 Super Circle No. 2

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Koolpin to Twin via Jim Jim

Day 0 Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Holiday Inn, 122 The Esplanade. **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 Darwin Transit Centre 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 2–11 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 12 Walk to Twin Falls. Those finishing here have the choice of a drop off in Cooinda or at their accommodation in Darwin. Those going to Darwin will arrive quite late, probably after 9 p.m. in the late afternoon. If you have the time, we recommend booking a budget room at Cooinda, doing the Yellow Waters cruise the following morning and catching the afternoon bus back to Darwin.

Section 2 Twin to Gunlom

Day 12 8 a.m. pick up for those beginning with this section. Pick up is from your accommodation if you have notified us where you are staying at least a week before departure. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc. Meet group, bush camp.

Day 13–20 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 21 Return to vehicles. Drive to Warradjan and Cooinda. Evening Yellow Waters cruise.

Day 22 Depart Cooinda and begin drive to Darwin, stopping at Nourlangie and/or the Bowali Visitor Centre. Arrive early afternoon. Drop off at airport or your accommodation.