

DRAFT: In Leichhardt's Footsteps: June 10-30, 2012

This is one of the most exciting trips we have ever been able to offer, retracing the steps of one of Australia's greatest explorers, Ludwig Leichhardt. Leichhardt's epic 1844-45 journey took him from Brisbane to the long abandoned settlement of Port Essington in what is now Arnhem Land. We will follow a small part of that route through a part of southwest Arnhem Land, finishing near Jim Jim Falls in Kakadu. We too can experience the same awe that struck Leichhardt in passing through this beautiful country as it has barely changed in the intervening 160 years.

Leichhardt is one of Australia's most underrated explorers. He rejoiced in the beauty of the land unlike many of his contemporaries who saw the bush as a frightening, hostile place to be endured and, if possible, conquered. Leichhardt had the foresight to bring two Aboriginal guides who were able to negotiate with the local tribes and supplement their supplies with bush tucker. We will follow Leichhardt's example and bring two Aboriginal guides who will be able to help us identify and sample the local bush tucker as well as interpreting areas of cultural significance such as the numerous art sites we will encounter along the way.

The land we pass through is mainly owned by the Jawoyn people and includes parts of Kakadu that are not normally accessible to bushwalkers. It includes a major gorge system that we have never visited before. Thanks to Leichhardt's detailed journals and maps we should be able to almost exactly replicate his route and identify some of the precise landmarks he mentioned. We may, however, occasionally deviate slightly from his route so that we can enjoy some of the wonderful campsites, waterfalls and swimming holes that we know exist nearby.

We know of one group of bushwalkers who did a similar walk about ten years ago. We did it in 2005. Other than that, we may be the first to follow this exact route since Leichhardt did it himself. Our journey will be substantially easier as we will use a helicopter to bring in a food drop at the halfway point.

The flood plains of Kakadu do not offer as enjoyable a bushwalking experience as the Arnhem Plateau. They do, however, have their own special beauty so we will finish the walk with a Yellow Waters cruise and a night in Jabiru so that you can experience this environment as well.

If you wish to be among the first people to follow the route of one of Australia's greatest explorers, this trip could be a once in a lifetime opportunity.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 2. Although June and July are the two coolest months of the year, the maximum temperature on most days will still average 30-31°C (86-88°F) . Although the average nightly minimum is reasonably warm at about 14-18°C (57-64°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.

Remember. This is an exploratory trip. We have not done the route so we may encounter terrain which is more difficult than we anticipate.

- 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 a total of about 2½-3½ kg of the evening meals on each section. 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 any of the campsites, except perhaps at the very end of the walk..
- Swims** Swimming is excellent along most of the route. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
- Lowlights** Carrying food for 11 days. Possible tourist crowds at Jim Jim.
- Highlights** Perfect weather, great scenery, excellent swimming holes, Aboriginal art sites, Aboriginal guides, reliving a part of one of Australia's greatest feats of exploration.
- 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 the Kakadu part of the walk. Should be very good outside the park.
- Maps** 1:100 000 Jim Jim, Snowdrop, Gilruth
1:50 000 Djavan, Snowdrop, Gimbat, Maiali, Jim Jim Falls

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 experience to remember for a lifetime as well as a hint of what it was like for Leichhardt back in the 1840s.

As there will be a food drop, you should have your food for the second half in a parcel which can be given to the guide at the trip meeting the night before departure.

It should be possible for us to arrange to have a few fresh things brought in with the food drop. If you want anything fresh brought in, bring a list to the pre-trip meeting.

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.

Bush roads can easily change from year to year. In 2005, the group did not reach the start of the walk until mid-morning on day 2. That could happen again.

Leichhardt's journal is on the web. See <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5005/5005-h/5005-h.htm>

Chapters 14 and 15 cover when he went through Kakadu.

This trip is relatively expensive for a variety of reasons.

- We must pay a per person fee for permission to walk across the Jawoyn lands.
- We must pay for both our guide and the Aboriginal guide or Jawoyn Association staff.
- The helicopter must come a long way to reach us. Although helicopters are expensive, using one allows us to extend the walk to three weeks and make the most of this opportunity without having to carry super heavy loads.
- The track to the beginning of the walk is one of the roughest we use anywhere so the wear and tear on the vehicles is higher than normal.

Three of our four largest costs (our guide, the Aboriginal guide and the helicopter food drop) are not affected by the number of people on the trip. The fourth, transport, is unaffected past the first six clients. Rather than charge a huge price which would cover us for small groups, we prefer to offer the trip at a reasonable price with a **surcharge for smaller groups**.

The surcharge will be payable immediately prior to departure if and only if we do not have eight or more clients. That charge is not subject to any discounts and is as follows.

4 people: \$900 each 5 people: \$350 each 6 people: \$325 each 7 people: \$175 each

Similarly, in order to keep our prices reasonable, we have based our price for those doing either half of the trip on approximately equal numbers coming in and out with the helicopter.

If substantially more people choose one section than the other, we will have to charge extra for the empty space in the helicopter going one way. This charge could be as high as \$500 per person. If you book one section, we will let you know whether or not there might be an extra charge at least two months prior to departure.

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: In Leichhardt's Footsteps

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Start to Food Drop

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 alternate arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street.
Drive to the start – or as near to it as we can get. 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 Food drop comes in. We will probably camp near the food drop so that we can enjoy some heavy special foods.

Section 2 Food Drop to Finish

Day 11 Those starting with this section will have to make their way to Jabiru or Katherine, whichever becomes the base for our food drop.

Day 12 8 a.m. pick up for those beginning with this section. Fly to food drop. Bush camp.

Day 13–19 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 20 Finish walk. Drive to Warradjan and Cooinda. Evening Yellow Waters cruise.

Day 21 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.