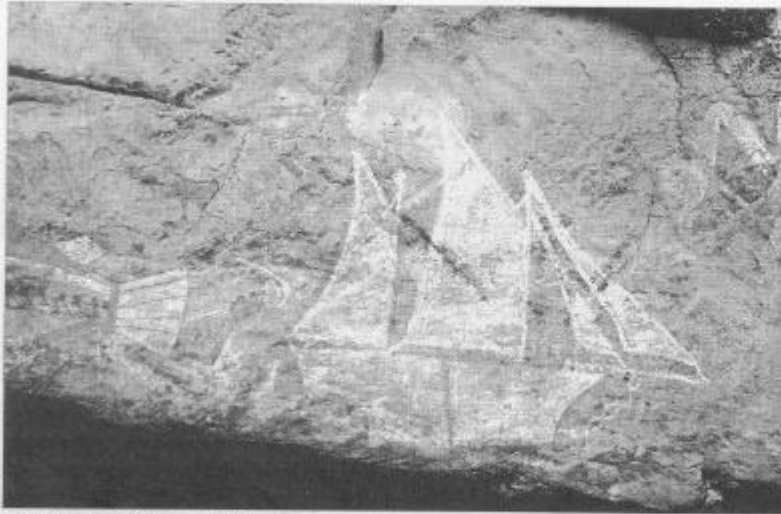


Kakadu In The Wet Season

by Alan Dixon



Aboriginal art (Photo: Alan Dixon)

Having led several club walks in Kakadu in the dry season, I wanted to see the "Top End" in the wet season. However, I could not organise a club walk there in that season, as I would not know which creeks would be crossable. I could go on a Willis's Walkabouts walk, as Steve and Mary Robinson have done, but the heat and humidity might be too much for me. Therefore, when I learned that Willis runs a "Kakadu Light" trip in the wet season, and that it consists of short walks and visits to interesting places, I was eager to book in.

In February I flew to Darwin and met our leader Marj, and the other group members, who were Eric, Margo and Zoe. Eric, who is Dutch, had come to Australia several times, and had done one of Willis's dry-season walks.

The next day, we set out in a Toyota Troop Carrier. Willis had replaced the sideways-facing seats in the back with conventional forward-facing ones, which was a great improvement.

We went to Fogg Dam, which is no longer used as a dam and is now a wetland. We saw some water birds, but birds spread out during the wet season, and the best time to see a lot of them is in the dry season.

We had lunch (we supplied our own lunches and breakfasts), then did a short walk to the Mamakula Billabong. I was impressed by the amount of water lying about nearly everywhere, and by the greenness of the grass, which is brown and like straw in the dry season.

As always, it was hot and humid, but it was cloudy and this made it

bearable. When the sun shines, it is very unpleasant. There was only a little rain on this day. On other days there would be thunderstorms, but we never had a full wet day.

We had a good look at the Bowali Visitor Centre, which was well worth a visit, then went to Lakeview in Jabiru and moved into cabins.

The company was responsible for evening meals, and Marj took us to the restaurant in the sports club.

The next day we would have gone on an Aboriginal cultural tour, consisting of a wetland cruise and a visit to the Aboriginal occupation site of Ubirr. However, the water was too shallow, so we did a walk to the Gubara Pools instead. Willis's wet-season trips have to be flexible,

because creeks and wetlands can be too shallow for a boat, creek crossings can be too deep for a vehicle and it can be too cloudy for a scenic flight.

The Gubara Pools were pleasant to swim in, then we climbed a hill and looked at some Aboriginal paintings under an overhang.

The next day we did the 12-kilometre Barkk Walk. On this walk we went to a major site for Aboriginal paintings. As well as fish and animals, there were Fire Woman and a European sailing ship: the Aborigines paint what they see. Some of the human figures had six fingers, which indicates that they are not actually people, but spirits.

On this day the weather was the worst on our trip. It was mostly sunny, the maximum temperature was 35 degrees and it was humid. In Sydney it is bone dry if the



Jim Jim Falls from the scenic flight plane (Photo: Alan Dixon)

Kakadu In The Wet Season (Continued)

by Alan Dixon

*Pagodas (Photo: Alan Dixon)*

temperature is that high. Marj advised us to go up hills very slowly as, if you overheat, it takes a long time to cool down. That night Marj organised a barbecue for us.

The next day there was a heavy storm before dawn, and we thought that our scenic flight might be cancelled. Fortunately, the sun came out and the flight was on. We had a good look at Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls. They both looked spectacular, and Jim Jim Falls had filled the valley downstream of itself with mist.

That afternoon we went on a boat cruise at Yellow Waters, and to the Aboriginal Cultural Centre at Cooina, which was well worth a visit.

The next day, we did the fairly short Yurmikmik Walk, which goes to Motorcar Falls and back. This waterfall is one of the largest that people can get to in the wet season.

We then went to Katherine and stayed in a caravan park. I had only booked into Section 1 of the trip, as I had commitments in Sydney, so the next morning I caught the bus to Darwin, and I flew home the day after that. Marj, Margo, Zoe and Eric started on Section 2. They were to go to Nitmiluk, Litchfield and the Territory Wildlife Park.

The Kakadu Light trip was a very good way of seeing the Top End in the wet season without doing a full-pack walk. It was good to see the waterfalls and the lightning displays

as well as things that you can also see in the dry season, such as Aboriginal paintings.

I have thought about whether I will go on one of Willis's full-pack walks in the wet season, but have not decided yet. Day walks include walking in the afternoon, when temperatures are highest, while on full-pack walks nearly all of the walking is done in the morning. Therefore, the question is whether carrying a full pack in the morning is worse than carrying a day pack in the morning and afternoon. Steve and Mary Robinson certainly found that doing a full-pack walk was worthwhile.

