

Kakadu Circle No. 2: June 21 - July 4, 2009

In order to fit in with some southern school holidays and fit the walk into two weeks while allowing an appropriate food without having to move at an exceptionally fast pace, a small section at the end of the full trip has been cut off so you exit at Barramundi Falls rather than at Gunlom Falls.

Section 1: Koolpin to Twin: June 21-27

The walk begins at Flying Fox Crossing on the South Alligator River in the southern part of 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 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 at least a day to reach the top.

From the top of the gorge, there are a number of possible routes to Twin Falls Creek. Your guide will decide which one to take based on the availability of water and on the interests and energy of the group. All take about two days. None is particularly difficult. All offer the opportunity to view a number of Aboriginal art sites, either on the main route or as a side trip from it.

Continuing downstream from where we first meet it, Twin Falls Creek passes through a mix of sandy and rocky areas for about six kilometres to the Amphitheatre Falls where the river drops 20 metres into the upper gorge. Few groups have ever been able to resist spending at least an hour here just admiring the views and enjoying the pool below the falls. Another seven kilometres past sandy beaches and more pools brings us to the top of Twin Falls. The last two km of this route is in a restricted area where we have to stick to a marked trail.

Twin Falls consists of a series of drops of up to 20 metres and a final 80 metre plunge into the gorge below. Here we have a break and take time to enjoy the spectacular views. The route to the bottom of the lower gorge follows the same marked trail that we first met above the falls. It is moderately rugged in places with a steep climb at the end.

We meet our food drop at the Twin Falls car park. From here it is a short distance to our campsite on a sandy beach next to the creek. Unfortunately, this is an area where swimming is neither safe nor 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 we arrive early enough, it may be possible to 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.

We may now have a day at our disposal. If so, you will have the choice of relaxing at the camp or doing a day-walk to Jim Jim Falls. Jim Jim is the highest waterfall in Kakadu, over 200 metres in total with a final drop of about 160 metres.

Maps. El Sherana (1st few km at beginning of walk), Koolpin & Jim Jim Falls or 1:100 000 Stow (1st few km at beginning of walk) & Jim Jim.

Section 2: Twin to Barramundi: June 27 - July 4

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 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 exit via Barramundi Falls, one of the most popular waterfalls in the park. After one final swim, we climb into the bus for the return to Darwin.

Maps. 1:50 000 Jim Jim Falls (short bit at beginning of walk), Koolpin & Goodparla or 1:100 000 Jim Jim & Mundogie.

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. Although the average nightly minimum is about 16-18°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 2. You need to carry 7 days food. This will include about 2-3 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 and early July is a good time 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	The long walk between Twin Falls Creek and Surprise Falls. 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.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Notes

If you meet 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.

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.

On long days such as the first day of section two, starting as early as possible makes the day much easier. Please do everything you can to assist the guide to get the group going quickly.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives. It may not be possible to get into your pack until the vehicle is unloaded at the end.

The vehicle which brings in the food drop may be part of another tour. If so, it will not be possible to send anything back to Darwin at the end of the first section and have it waiting for you when you return. If you wish to send something back, you will need to confirm whether or not this will be possible shortly before departure.

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

Notes for those doing only one section

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 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.

The vehicle which is scheduled to take you in to or out from Twin Falls is likely to be scheduled to provide the transport for the Twin to Jim Jim Circle trip. If space is available, we can provide transport from Darwin for those beginning with section two. We will not know whether or not this will be possible until shortly before departure. It is only by using each of our vehicles for as many things as possible that we can keep our prices as low as we do.

Itinerary: Kakadu 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

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 the 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 2–6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Walk to Twin Falls. Those finishing here will be driven to Cooina or Darwin in the late afternoon, their choice. If you would like to experience the Kakadu wetlands, we recommend booking a budget room at Cooina and doing the Yellow Waters cruise the following morning. We cannot take more than six people back to Darwin. If you want a ride back, please let us know well in advance, first come, first served.

Section 2 Twin to Barramundi

Day 7 We can take up to six people out to Kakadu in the vehicle which brings out the food drop. If more than six are joining the trip, some of them will have to catch the Greyhound-Pioneer bus from Darwin to Cooina at about 6.30 a.m. If you go out a day early, this gives you a chance to experience the Kakadu wetlands with a Yellow Waters Cruise.

There is only one bus per day. Check the current timetable when you book. The cost of the bus is not included in the cost of the tour.

If you take the bus, wait in the open air pub and meet our vehicle there. If there are more than six people joining the trip, the vehicle will have to come from Darwin, drive to Twin Falls and return to Cooina to collect some of the group. This can make the pick up quite late. Food drop meal, bush camp.

Day 8–13 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 14 Return to vehicles. Drive to Darwin via Pine Creek. Drop off at your accommodation.