

Kakadu Highlights No. 1: January 4-17, 2009

Section 1: Motorcar and Kurrundie Creeks: January 4-10

The walk begins at the Yurmikmik car park in the southern part of Kakadu, about 310 kilometres and four to five hours from Darwin. We start with a fairly flat 45 minute walk along a marked trail to the main falls and pool on Motorcar Creek — a beautiful spot and our first swim stop. From here we may decide to set up camp and do a day walk or move directly to the upper part of Motorcar Creek.

Motorcar Creek splits into several branches not far above the falls. These offer one of the most concentrated collections of small waterfalls and pools in Kakadu. We gradually work our way up along one or more of these branches, stopping for a swim any time a pool is just too inviting to resist. We may do some of these with full packs. We will almost certainly spend at least one day exploring without full packs.

The central section of Kurrundie Creek is beautiful, with a number of deep pools and nice waterfalls. The walking is, however, fairly difficult. Depending on the wishes of the group, we may do a short walk to Kurrundie and follow it down to the main falls or we may follow a different branch of Motorcar back to the main falls.

The lower loop, which we may do with day packs or full packs depending on where we decide to camp takes us through lower Kurrundie Gorge with its steep walls and long pools and along the lower section of Motorcar Creek with its lovely waterfall.

Whichever routes we have chosen, a short walk on the final full day brings us back to the vehicle for the drive to Cooinda where we do the 3 pm Yellow Waters Cruise and get a good view of the Kakadu wetlands. If time permits, we will make a short visit to the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre before or after the cruise. We then drive to Jabiru and spend the night at the Kakadu Lodge.

Maps. 1:50 000 Callanan or 1:100 000 Ranford Hill topographic.

Section 2: Baroalba Creek: January 9-17

The section overlaps the first. It includes the Yellow Waters cruise and night at the Kakadu Lodge in Jabiru.

Baroalba Creek is the main drainage for Mount Brockman, a large, irregularly shaped massif sitting on the plains a few kilometres away from the edge of the Arnhem escarpment. Its maximum dimensions are about 11 kilometres east to west and 15 kilometres north to south. Its maximum height is about 300 metres above sea level, about 240 metres above the surrounding plain. While the edges of the massif are extremely rugged and steep, much of the centre consists of a large basin drained by Baroalba Creek. The best time to visit this area is during or immediately after the green season when every creek is flowing and the waterholes are all full as will be the case on this trip.

The rugged nature of the approaches prevented buffalo from reaching the basin, making this one of the few undisturbed areas in Kakadu. The area is full of rock shelters that were used by Aboriginal people over the millennia. It contains what may well be the greatest concentration of Aboriginal rock art in Australia, dating from the most ancient to the most recent.

Because of the archaeological importance of this area, walking parties are restricted to a maximum of nine people. You are likely to see more Aboriginal art in more different styles than on any of our other trips of a similar length.

The walk starts with an easy three kilometre stroll along an old four wheel drive track to Baroalba Springs where we can enjoy a refreshing swim. From here, we leave all tracks behind, beginning a somewhat strenuous scramble up the boulder strewn creek. Once inside the basin, the ground levels out and the walking becomes easier. There are a number of nice camp sites to tempt us as we work our way upstream, taking our time, stopping every so often to have a swim or just to enjoy the shade of a cool rock shelter or the sight of a particularly colourful patch of flowers.

The next few days are spent slowly working our way upstream, exploring the many wonderful rock shelters, art sites and pools. Some of the walking will be done with daypacks from base camps.

Sunrise and sunset from the Baroalba high points are among the nicest views in Kakadu. We may decide to carry water up and spend one or two nights camped on high points. We return via a slightly different route to the track we walked along on the first day.

Map. 1:50 000 Nourlangie Creek or 1:100 000 Cahill. (The Cahill map is a much older map than Nourlangie Creek.)

Notes for section 2. You need to be prepared to carry up to six litres of water if we do a high point camp. Water containers can be filled just prior to the climbs so they will not have to be carried for more than about two hours. Wine bladders weigh little and make good collapsible water containers.

Exceptionally severe flooding can mean that we have to walk a portion of the vehicle track leading to the Baroalba car park.

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.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

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

Terrain

Level 3.

Section 1. Whichever route we choose, the beginning of the walk is fairly flat and straightforward. There is a short but sharp climb up at Motorcar Falls and a similar climb down at Kurrundie. There will be a substantial amount of rock hopping along the creeks.

Section 2. Variable. Going up Baroalba Creek at the beginning is a slow scramble over rocks of a variety of sizes. Frequent rest and swim stops make it easier. Once in the central basin, the walking becomes fairly flat and relatively easy until you do the high point climbs. People who have never walked in this kind of terrain may find that this is one of the most physically demanding things they have ever done. Baroalba Creek has many rock shelters if we wish to get out of any rain which may be occurring.

The climbs are relatively short but quite steep and rugged. A few short sections of most of the climbs are quite exposed and many people will need some assistance. Most people will need to pass packs in at least one point both on the ascent and descent. *People who have a severe fear of heights should not choose this trip.*

Both sections. The creeks are likely to be low enough so that swimming across with packs will not be necessary. Exceptional rain could cause this to change.

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 sections.

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.

Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry a week's 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 and fly.
Art	Minor sites on section one. Section two includes some of the best in Kakadu.
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 most of the routes.
Swims	This is the best time to see Kakadu's waterfalls. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot. 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.
Lowlights	Heat and humidity. Possible lack of rain can make it more uncomfortable than normal. Exceptional rain can slow us down. Carrying a week's food.
Highlights	Wet season waterfalls. 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 estuarine crocodiles.
Fishing	Not permitted on this walk.

Notes — both sections.

Rain is very likely at this time of year. 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. A pack liner is essential at this time of year. Garbages are not satisfactory.

It is a good idea to have a change of clothes and a towel to take advantage of the hot showers at Coinda.

The Jabiru store has a reasonable selection of foods but if you want anything out of the ordinary, plan to bring it with you from the start.

Extreme wet season rains can close roads and cause delays. This is not likely but you need to be aware that it can happen.

Those doing both sections of the trip will have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

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

The cost of the accommodation between sections is included in the price for those doing both sections.

Coinda and Jabiru

Coinda 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 Coinda 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 to approach the wildlife much closer than you could do on foot. The cultural centre is a few hundred metres from the hotel and campground and provides an insight into the lives of the Aboriginal traditional owners of the park. The nature walk is generally under water at this time of year.

Both the cultural centre and the shop 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.

In late 2001, the Coinda management decided to close the resort for the wet season and eliminate the first and last cruises of the day. This is likely to apply yet again this year. We have, therefore, changed our original cruise time and switched our accommodation to Jabiru.

Jabiru is a small mining town with the kind of shops you would expect to find in a small country town anywhere in Australia. Kakadu Lodge is a caravan park which has a number of four-bed rooms. If you do not wish to share with up to three others, you can pay a surcharge and upgrade to having a Lodge room to yourself or transferring to the nearby Crocodile Hotel.

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 1

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 All itineraries may be subject to change.

Section 1 Motorcar and Kurrundie Creeks

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 other arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from Darwin Transit Centre at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu via Pine Creek. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc. Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-5 Bush camping, carrying full packs some days, day packs others.

Day 6 Return to vehicle, drive to Cooinda, 3 pm Yellow Waters Cruise. Drive to Jabiru, overnight at Kakadu Lodge.

Day 7 Those continuing drive to Baroalba Creek early in the morning. Those finishing here catch a bus back to Darwin. See Day 6 below for information about the buses.

Section 2 Baroalba Creek

Day 6 Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooinda early in the morning. The cost of getting to Cooinda is not included in the cost of the tour. Greyhound ran a scheduled service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the time these notes were written. Check the current timetable when you book. If you can't make the connection with Greyhound, you should be able to book a seat on a tour bus. The three companies to try are: Top End Escapes (1300 736 892), AAT Kings (08 8923 6555) and APT (08 8984 2999). On arrival, you can wait at the shop and meet the group when they arrive for the afternoon cruise. Or, make your own way to the cruise and meet them there. Due to the fact that the members of the group are finishing a walk that morning, we cannot be more specific about the arrival time than to say it will be about lunch time. Make sure you bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Drive to Jabiru. Overnight at Kakadu Lodge.

Day 7 Drive to Baroalba car park. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 8-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs every day.

Day 14 Return to vehicles. Drive to Darwin. Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon.