

Kakadu Highlights No. 3: April 5-18, 2009

We hope to have one or two Aboriginal guides accompany section two of this trip.

Section 1: Dinner to Kurrundie or Motorcar Creek: April 5-12

We begin with a four to five hour, 350 kilometre drive from Darwin. If we are lucky, the ford at the Flying Fox Crossing on the South Alligator River will be open to traffic and we will be able to drive to within five kilometres of Dinner Creek. If not, we will have a fifteen kilometre walk along a 4WD track during a time when the extra water brings the surrounding countryside to its scenic best.

Dinner Creek is environmentally sensitive so group size is limited to a maximum of 9 people. Traditional Aboriginal beliefs restrict visits to the period from April through September.

Once we reach Dinner Creek, an easy two kilometre walk up Dinner Creek takes us to our first possible campsite, a sandy bank next to a large pool. Depending on time, we may choose to stop here or we may press on. Whether or not we stop for the night, we certainly will stop for a swim.

Continuing up Dinner Creek, we drop our packs and go off to explore one of its tributaries where we find one of the most interesting geological features in Kakadu, for some, a truly special place. After a pleasant few hours, we continue up the main branch to our campsite, another sandy beach next to yet another nice pool. We leave our packs and wander up to the main falls for a swim. Next day, we climb up above the falls where we stop to enjoy the views and the pools.

A few kilometres above the falls, we enter an area we visit only once a year as we continue our explorations of the upper reaches of Dinner Creek and the cross country route to Kurrundie Creek. We reach Kurrundie several kilometres above the main falls and rejoin familiar territory.

This part of Kurrundie Creek is beautiful with a number of deep pools and nice waterfalls. The walking is, however, fairly rugged with a lot of small ups and downs. We take our time, stopping for several swims as we make our way down to the falls and thence into the lower Kurrundie Gorge where we set up camp near one of the many long pools. A short walk on the final day brings us back to the road. If we were able to drive all the way in, the group may have a wait near a river while the guide retrieves the vehicle.

Depending on the conditions we encounter and on the speed of the group, we may continue past Kurrundie and come down Motorcar Creek.

If there are people doing only one section of the trip, the guide will drive to Pine Creek to do the drop off and/or pick up. Those doing both sections will have the choice of driving to Pine Creek with the guide or staying behind and relaxing next to one of the many pools in the area. (The return trip to Pine Creek would probably take about four hours.)

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana and Callanan or 1:100 000 Stow and Ranford Hill.

Section 2: Koolpin and Waterfall Creeks: April 12-18

This trip is intended to be run at a slightly faster pace than section one. This should still, allow plenty of time for swimming and relaxation. A fast group could cover more ground and explore a few additional places. There is even the possibility of some people having a relaxing afternoon by a pool while the guide leads the others on an exploration of the surrounding area.

If the 4WD track to Koolpin Gorge is closed (probable at this time of year), we begin with a relatively flat eight kilometre walk from Flying Fox Crossing to the main camp ground which we will have to ourselves. If the track is open, we can drive all the way in and begin our walk up the gorge. (If we do drive in, the guide will drive the vehicle back out to the main road and walk back to the gorge.)

In April, the waterfalls in Koolpin Gorge are flowing much better than they do later in the year. The views are a photographers delight and the many pools are perfect for swimming. 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 at least a day to reach the top.

From the top of the gorge, we head approximately north as we do a relatively flat ten kilometre walk up a small tributary creek to a magnificent little waterfall and nice pool, a perfect camp site. From here, we make our way out to another tributary and through the pass separating Koolpin and Barramundi, continuing down to a small waterfall and the largest pool in the entire Barramundi system. Huge *Allosyncarpia* trees provide deep shade on the wide sandy banks of the pool, one of the nicest campsites in Kakadu.

The total distance is approximately fifteen kilometres through varied terrain so we may decide to camp en route. This area has so much to offer that we may decide to spend two nights in the one spot. A day walk could range from five to fifteen kilometres depending on the wishes of those taking part.

The morning we leave the big pool is more strenuous than most. A one kilometre walk brings us to the steepest climb of the trip — and one of the most magnificent views as we look out across the plateau and the broken rock 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 Falls. A six kilometre walk brings us to a rocky area with numerous pools and cascades. A further four kilometres and we arrive at the top of Gunlom Falls where we look out over the plains below and the track which leads back to where we left the vehicle. The walk along the track to the vehicle is about 15 kilometres. If the Gunlom road is open, the guide can collect the vehicle while the group relaxes at the pool below the falls. If the road is not open, the whole group will have to walk about 11 kilometres back to the main road and wait there while the guide collects the vehicle.

Maps. 1:50 000 Koolpin and Goodparla or 1:100 000 Jim Jim and Mundogie.

Note. We will need to do a car shuffle at the beginning and end of this walk.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 4. It will be hot. It will also be humid although the humidity normally drops substantially between March and April. The average daily maximum is 34°C (94°F). If we get a relatively dry spell, the temperature could reach 40°C (104°F). The average minimum is 21-23°C (70-72°F). Sleeping bags are not needed. Rain is fairly likely but it should not rain much..

Averages can be misleading. Occasionally, a monsoonal low associated with a late cyclone will cause it to rain for several days in a row. (This makes it somewhat harder to walk but it also makes the waterfalls more spectacular and keeps it relatively cool.) In other years, it may not rain a drop.

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 from Dinner Creek to the plateau after which it becomes relatively flat once more. The final descent is steep but short. There will be a substantial amount of rock hopping along the creeks. The terrain coming down Motorcar Creek is easier than that along Kurrundie but the walk becomes longer.

Section 2. Although some sections of this walk are fairly flat and straightforward, others are anything but. There are some longish sections of rock scrambling and a couple of short but sharp climbs. There are one or two fairly creek crossings where have to wade across over large rocks. If you have never done this before, you may find this fairly difficult.

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. Such a swim is more likely on section two than on section one.

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 2-4. 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 are likely to encounter short sections of partially collapsed and seeding spear grass during some portion of the trip, but this late it is unlikely that there will be as much as in March.

Hours Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer. Section

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 or mosquito net and fly.

Art Minor sites on section one and some major ones on section two. Koolpin has one of the greatest concentrations of rock paintings in Kakadu.

Campsites Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else anywhere along most of the routes.

Swims This is a good time to see the waterfalls on these routes. We will have good pools at every campsite and almost every lunch spot as well as other pools along the way..

Lowlights Heat and humidity. Carrying food for a week. Pushing through thick grass.

Highlights Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. Walking with an Aboriginal guide. A still 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.

Fishing Not permitted on this walk.

Notes

Although an Aboriginal guide is planning to accompany one or both sections of this trip, there are a number of cultural responsibilities which could make this impossible.

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.

Make sure you keep some money and a water bottle with you during the drives as it may be difficult to get things out of your pack during the day.

Exceptionally severe flooding is unlikely but conceivable in April. This can cause route changes and could conceivably cause a delay in the return to Darwin.

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

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 3

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary may be subject to change.

Section 1 Dinner to Kurrundie or Motorcar

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 drinks, etc.
Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Those ending with this section return to Pine Creek where they can catch a late afternoon Greyhound-Pioneer or McCaffertys bus to Darwin or Katherine. We strongly recommend booking in advance. Please check the bus timetables when you book.
Those continuing go straight to Koolpin Creek. If space is available, there is an option of doing the drive to Pine Creek

Section 2 Koolpin and Waterfall Creeks

Day 7 Those beginning with this section meet group at Hard Rock Cafe or next door at pub about lunch time. As we are finishing a walk that morning, we cannot be more specific about our arrival time.
To make the connection, you can catch a morning bus (Greyhound-Pioneer or McCaffertys) to Pine Creek. Check timetable when you book. Any arrival before 1 p.m. is satisfactory.
Drive to Koolpin and begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 8-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 14 Return to vehicle. Drive to Darwin via Pine Creek. Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon.