

# Kakadu Highlights No. 4: May 17-30, 2009

## Section 1: Baroalba Creek and Radon Gorge: May 17-21

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.

We begin with a drive of almost 300 km from Darwin followed by 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. Sunrise and sunset from the Baroalba high points are among the nicest views in Kakadu. We may decide to carry water up and spend a night camped on a high point. About nine kilometres above Baroalba Springs, we move into territory untouched on any of our other trips as we move toward the headwaters of the main branch of Baroalba Creek. A short climb over a pass brings us to Radon Creek, the largest in the northern part of the massif. Radon Gorge is steep, narrow, cool and beautiful. Toward the end of the gorge we have a choice: a strenuous climb up and around or a jump combined with lowering packs onto an airbed in the pool below.

From the bottom of Radon Gorge, it is a 12 kilometre walk back along the western side of the massif to our vehicle. Some groups camp en route, some do it in a single day. Alternatively, by taking short cuts, we could return through the centre of the massif in two days.

This section finishes with a drive to Katherine. Those doing only this section have the choice of being dropped off at Coinda, Pine Creek or Katherine.

### Terrain and difficulty.

<b>Overall</b>	Level 3
<b>Climate</b>	Level 2-3. Average daytime max 31-32°C (88-90°F), average night min 20-22°C (68-70°F), but it can get much cooler. Generally low humidity. Rain unlikely but possible.
<b>Terrain</b>	Level 3. 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. The terrain in Radon Gorge is similar, fairly broken with some short but steep 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. The section along 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. <i>People who have a severe fear of heights should not choose this trip.</i>

<b>Vegetation</b>	Level 2-3. 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.
<b>Hours</b>	Generally 4-6 hours. Only a very slow group would take longer.
<b>Packs</b>	<b>Pack weight</b> - level 2-3. You need to carry 5½ days food. You should bring a light sleeping bag and some sort of light shelter.
<b>Art</b>	This is one of the best areas for Aboriginal art anywhere in Australia.
<b>Campsites</b>	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
<b>Swims</b>	Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
<b>Lowlights</b>	Some stretches of rough terrain. Upper reaches of creeks may not be flowing.
<b>Highlights</b>	Incredible Aboriginal rock art. Rugged rock formations. Scenic views. Good weather. Great swimming holes.
<b>Wildlife</b>	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
<b>Fishing</b>	Not permitted here.

**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 1.** You need to be prepared to carry up to six litres of water in case we decide to camp on a high point. 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.

## **Section 2: Manyallaluk to Katherine Gorge: May 22-30**

Tens of thousands of people flock to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park every year. The vast majority spend about half a day doing a boat cruise through a small part of the gorge system before moving on. A few do a longer cruise, hire a canoe or take a short walk on one of the marked trails. Not one in a hundred would put on a pack and do an overnight walk. Not one in a thousand will do a really long walk, getting off the trails and seeing some of the hidden wonders of the park. Almost no one has ever had an experience like the one we are now able to offer.

Nitmiluk is Aboriginal Land, owned by the same people who lived in the region since the Dreamtime. In combination with Manyallaluk Aboriginal Cultural Tours, we are proud to offer you a chance to experience a small portion of their culture combined with a walk through portions of the Katherine Gorge system which tourists never visit.

After spending a night in Katherine, we are picked up and driven to Manyallaluk where we are met by our Aboriginal guides for the day. A portion of the morning is spent on a short, informative walk where you are shown bush tucker and medicines that are in season at the time. On return, there should be time for a swim before a barbecue lunch.

Afternoon activities may include traditional bark painting, fire lighting, spear throwing, didgeridoo playing and basket weaving. You will be encouraged to participate in these activities so that you can better understand them. We spend the night in the Manyallaluk campground.

The next morning, we are driven to the start of the walk. After a brief visit to a nearby art site, our Aboriginal guide will lead us to the Katherine River, well beyond where the any tourists go. There is no trail, just the rugged beauty of the river, the gorge and its surrounds.

Over the next four days, we slowly work our way to the Jawoyn Valley, stopping to explore a number of side creeks along the way, probably swimming across the Katherine River without packs to do so. We will carry full packs for no more than half the time we are walking on this section.

From our final campsite in or near the Jawoyn Valley, we continue our journey downstream, not along the marked trail we meet in the Jawoyn Valley, but along the top of the gorge, or perhaps, floating through one section of it. The walk ends where we meet the boat which will take us through the lower portion of the gorge and back to where we have left a vehicle.

We spend the night in budget accommodation in Katherine and return to Darwin the following day.

**Maps.** 1:50 000 Comoye & Katherine or 1:100 000 Eva Valley & Katherine. The Nitmiluk Park map shows most of the route but is not satisfactory for off-track navigation.

### **Terrain and difficulty**

<b>Climate</b>	Level 2. Average daytime max 30-31°C (86-88°F), average nighttime min 14-16°C (57-61°F) but it can drop under 5°C (41°F). Low humidity. Rain very unlikely.
<b>Terrain</b>	Level 3. Most of the walking is relatively flat but there are a couple of steep (but short) climbs and some rugged sections of broken rock. If we were not having short days with full packs and doing a number of day walks along the way, this trip could rate as level 4 rather than level 3.
<b>Vegetation</b>	Level 2-3. Can vary from year to year depending on when last burnt. Most of the walking is through open woodland with a spear grass understory. Under normal circumstances, the tall grasses will have dried out and will not present much of a problem. In a year with a very late wet season, they may still be relatively green and somewhat difficult to push through.
<b>Hours</b>	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
<b>Packs</b>	<b>Pack weight</b> - level 3. You need to carry 7½ days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
<b>Art</b>	We will visit a few art sites we know about and may find others.
<b>Campsites</b>	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
<b>Swims</b>	Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
<b>Lowlights</b>	Meeting the Katherine Gorge tourists near the end of the walk. Fairly regular helicopter flights overhead when we get down into the main gorge.
<b>Highlights</b>	Walking with a local Aboriginal guide. Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites.
<b>Wildlife</b>	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
<b>Fishing</b>	Possible. Worth bringing a small handline for the first few days if you are keen on fishing.

### **Notes on Section 2**

Scenic helicopter flights are available at Katherine Gorge. The price ranges from about \$50 to over \$100 depending on what itinerary is chosen and on how many people share the flight. Depending on our arrival time, you will have the option of doing a flight either before or after the walk.

Although we have arranged to have an Aboriginal guide from Manyallaluk to accompany us for the walk from Manyallaluk to Katherine Gorge, unforeseen cultural obligations could make this impossible. In that case, we will do the walk with only the Willis's Walkabouts guides.

We may choose to camp on the far side of the Katherine River. This could require a pack float. Similarly, we might choose to float packs for a short section on the final day.

There will probably be a car shuffle at the beginning of this section.

A day pack will be useful on this section.

### **Notes on both sections**

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.

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

There should be an opportunity to do some shopping in Katherine between sections. The kiosk at the gorge has cold drinks and a limited supply of groceries. You should allow extra money for this. (Cold drinks are almost irresistible.)

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.

People who have had no off-track bushwalking experience are likely to find this substantially more difficult than those who have had a lot of such experience.

## **Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 4**

**Note 1** Day 0 is the day before departure.

**Note 2** All itineraries may be subject to change.

### **Section 1 Baroalba Creek and Radon Gorge**

**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 Jabiru. There will be a stop along the way to buy cool drinks, etc. Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

**Day 2-4** Bush camping, carrying full packs.

**Day 5** Return to vehicle, drive to Katherine via Pine Creek. Those finishing here can choose to get dropped off at Coinda or Pine Creek if they prefer.

### **Section 2 Manyallaluk to Katherine Gorge**

**Day 5** Those beginning with this section may meet the group the evening before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where the group will be staying.

Both Greyhound-Pioneer and McCaffertys have daily bus services between Darwin and Katherine.

**Day 6** Section two begins. 7.30 to 8 a.m. pick up at the Katherine Visitors Centre on the corner of Lindsay Street and the Stuart Highway for those beginning with this section.

Drive to gorge to leave vehicle, if this wasn't done the night before.

Manyallaluk guide picks us up for ride to Manyallaluk.

Aboriginal cultural activities. Overnight at Manyallaluk.

**Day 7** Drop off on walking route. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.

**Day 8-12** Follow Katherine River through Gorge.  
Bush camping carrying full packs.

**Day 13** Finish the walk. Catch a boat back through the lower gorge. Overnight in Katherine.

**Day 14** Return to Darwin, arriving early to mid afternoon.