

Kakadu Highlights No. 8: August 23 - September 5, 2009

Section 1: Graveside Area: August 23-30

This walk takes you into the greatest concentration of permanently flowing creeks we have yet found in Kakadu. You see a variety of landscapes, deep gorges, beautiful swimming pools and cascades as well as a number of little known Aboriginal art sites.

We begin with a four to six hour, 350 kilometre drive from Darwin. The last 45 kilometres is on a 4WD track which is so rough that it can take over two hours on its own. From the parking area, a relatively easy three kilometre walk across some fairly flat ground brings us to a lovely pool and our first camp site.

During the next five days, we visit Graveside Gorge, Cascades Creek and, if time permits, Gronophylum Creek.

The two main gorges at Graveside contain some of the nicest monsoon forest in Kakadu. We usually spend most of a day exploring the gorges, enjoying the shade and relaxing in and around the large pools.

Cascades Creek is noted for its many pools, cascades and Aboriginal art sites. It is so pleasant that our trip up or down the four kilometre gorge normally takes a full day. 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 last 500 metres alone 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.

The loop which joins the two creeks takes us through the open woodland of the plateau and through tall paperbarks and other trees which line the creek that drains the main valley.

We may also visit Gronophylum Creek with its unusual multi-trunked 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 you 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.

The loop described above may be done in either direction.

We return to the vehicle on the morning of the last full day and drive out to Cooina to meet those who are joining the trip for the third section. The afternoon is spent visiting some of the better known places like Nourlangie Rock or relaxing or whatever the group wishes.

The day finishes with a bistro meal at the resort and a night in budget accommodation. This section finishes with the 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise the following morning. The cruise gives you the opportunity to see the wetlands wildlife at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. The early hour ensures you see more of the wildlife than those who do the midday cruises.

Maps. 1:50 000 Koolpin or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Terrain and difficulty. The terrain ranges from open woodland to narrow rainforest gorges. Parts are flat and easy. Other parts require scrambling over river stones of a variety of sizes. There are a few steep, but short climbs. You walk through almost every type of terrain that it is possible to encounter in Kakadu. Overall, it rates as moderately difficult.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section three)

Overall Level 2.

Terrain Level 2-3. The terrain ranges from open woodland to narrow rainforest gorges. Parts are flat and easy. Other parts require scrambling over river stones of a variety of sizes. There are a few steep, but short climbs. You walk through almost every type of terrain that it is possible to encounter in Kakadu. The leisurely pace makes it easier than many of our other trips.

Vegetation Level 2. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek. There is likely to be one section of grass covered rocks on one short section.

Hours 4-6 hours most days.

Packs	Pack weight - level 2-3. You need to carry six days food.
Art	There are a number of interesting sites along this route.
Campsites	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have most or all of them to ourselves.
Swims	Swimming is excellent. Good pools at all campsites.
Lowlights	Very long drive from Darwin at the beginning, fairly long 4WD on the way out.
Highlights	The magical cascades and waterslide on Cascades Creek. Spectacular Graveside Gorge.

Section 2: Dinner Creek: August 29 - September 2

This section overlaps the first and includes the barbecue meal, night at Cooina and Yellow Waters cruise. If seats are available, it may also include the trip to Nourlangie Rock. If seats are limited, those who have done the first section have priority.

The drive from Cooina to the start of the walk is somewhat over 100 km, about half of which is on a gravel road. To reach Dinner Creek from where we leave the vehicles, we have our choice of a five kilometre walk along an old 4WD track or a somewhat longer but shadier walk along the South Alligator River. Another easy two kilometres brings us to the first of the large pools on Dinner Creek. After a swim stop, we continue up the main gorge to a base camp, a shady area next to another refreshing pool.

Dinner Creek is an environmentally sensitive area so group size is limited to a maximum of nine people. Traditional Aboriginal beliefs restrict visits to the period from April through September. It is also one of the very few areas in Kakadu where it is possible to do interesting one-day loop walks.

One of these loops will bring us to a high point from which we get some excellent views. The other brings us to one of the most interesting geological features in Kakadu, for some, a truly special place.

If some people are doing only section two or joining us for section three, 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.) If everyone is doing both sections, we will move directly to the start of the second walk.

Maps. 1:50 000 El Sherana or 1:100 000 Stow.

Note on section 2. The number of groups visiting Dinner Creek is limited. We cannot book our walk until we have bookings. If we do not get early bookings, we may have to substitute a different walk.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description after section three)

Overall	Level 2.
Terrain	Level 2. The first part of the walk is along a 4WD track; the next two km along flat ground. There is some rock hopping along the creek further up but the climbs are normally done with out full packs, making this one of the easiest trips we offer.
Vegetation	Level 2. Mostly open woodland or open areas along the creek. There is one section of fairly dense forest on one of the daywalks.
Hours	4-6 hours most days.
Packs	Pack weight - level 2. You need to carry three days food.
Art	There are a couple of minor art sites on this route. There is an interesting stone arrangement nearby.
Campsites	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have most or all of them to ourselves.
Swims	Swimming is excellent. Good pools at the main campsites.
Lowlights	Relatively long drive at the beginning, walking along the old 4WD track.
Highlights	Gorge scenery and an amazing rock formation. Great pools for swimming.

Section 3: Koolpin and Freezing Gorges: September 2-5

Koolpin Gorge is beautiful. Although the waterfalls may be little more than a trickle at this time of year, the pools are always perfect for swimming. The views are a photographer's 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. We normally take most of the day to reach our camp site near the top of the gorge.

The second day includes time for relaxing, swimming and visiting some of the Aboriginal art sites in the hills near the gorge. On the third day, we pack up and rock hop through a series of gullies as we make our way to Freezing Gorge. Freezing Creek is much smaller than Koolpin but it has carved a deep and narrow gorge where the sun seldom reaches the water, hence the name. The pools are just as inviting as those in Koolpin, perhaps more so since very few of the 4WD campers are aware that it exists so we seldom see anyone at any point along the creek. You need to be prepared for a short pack float as the alternative to a 30 metre swim is an hour or two of strenuous rock climbing. (You can waterproof your pack by lining it with 2 garbage bags, one inside the other, and sealing them carefully.) The walk down Freezing Creek below the gorge involves climbing over and scrambling around large boulders. A distance of about a kilometre may take two hours.

Although we do not rate this walk as difficult, the one km walk down Freezing Creek below the gorge can be a daunting experience for some people. People who have never done anything like this before may find it difficult. Progress down the creek may be quite slow.

On the final day, we return to the vehicle and drive back to Darwin.

Maps. 1:50 000 Koolpin or 1:100 000 Jim Jim.

Note for section 3. Some groups may do the loop in the reverse direction.

Terrain and Difficulty (more info in the general description at the end)

Overall	Level 3.
Terrain	Level 3. There are a few short but sharp climbs and a lot of rock hopping up the creek at Koolpin Gorge. As above, the walk down Freezing Gorge contains some serious rock scrambling.
Vegetation	Level 2. Mostly open woodland, open areas along the creeks or closed canopy rainforest with relatively thin undergrowth.
Hours	4-6 hours most days.
Packs	Waterproofing. We strongly recommend that you bring one or two strong garbages or something else you can use to keep your pack dry during the pack float on this section. The alternative to a 30 metre swim is a very strenuous climb. Pack weight - level 2. You need to carry three days food.
Art	There are a number of interesting art sites along this route.
Campsites	Sand or rock ledges. Excellent sites near the water. We should have most or all of them to ourselves.
Swims	Swimming is excellent. Good pools along both creeks.
Lowlights	Rough 4WD drive at the beginning and end, groups of other people in lower Koolpin.
Highlights	Spectacular gorge scenery. Great pools for swimming. Aboriginal art sites.

General Terrain and Difficulty for all sections

Terrain Little or 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 more than if you do not. The relatively easy nature of sections one and three means that they should suit almost anyone who meets our minimum level of fitness. Anyone who has already done section two should find that section three is easier than it would have been if they were beginning with section three.

Climate September is hot. The average daily maximum temperature for the month is 36°C (about 97°F). Fortunately, the average nightly minimum is reasonably cool at about 20-21°C (68-70°F). As the minimum temperatures have been known to drop below 15°C (about 60°F), we recommend bringing a lightweight sleeping bag. (Some people do, however, choose to replace their sleeping bag with thermals.) As long as we get an early start in the mornings, we should have plenty of time to rest during the hottest part of the day.

Although past records suggest less than a 50% chance of rain, you can get hit by an isolated storm. Bringing a lightweight tent fly will ensure you stay dry if it does happen to rain.

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

For those doing section one or two, it is a good idea to have a change of clothes and a towel to take advantage of the hot showers at Cooina. You should have enough money to pay for your drinks at the pub.

If you are meeting 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.

A day pack will be useful on section one.

Those doing more than one section 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 to and from Kakadu as it may be difficult to get into your pack during the journey.

Map. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas.

Cooinda

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 to see the wetlands wildlife (especially crocodiles and birds) at close range, far closer than you could approach on foot. The early/late hour ensures that you see more of the wildlife than those who do the midday cruises. 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.

Connecting bus services. If you are doing only part of the tour, the cost of getting to or from Cooinda or Pine Creek is not included in the tour cost. Greyhound ran a twice daily service to Pine Creek and a scheduled service on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to Cooinda at the time these notes were written. Check the current timetable when you book. If you can't make the connection to Cooinda 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).

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 8

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 All itineraries may be subject to change.

Section 1 Graveside

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 the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct 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 at times, day packs at others.

Day 7 Return to vehicles. Drive to Coinda, arriving about lunch time. Visit Nourlangie Rock if time permits. Book into budget accommodation. Opportunity to wash clothes and have hot shower. Bring towel and toiletries and money for drinks. Dinner at the pub.

Day 8 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters cruise. Section ends. Those ending here can catch a bus to Darwin. See the note on the previous page for details..

Section 2 Dinner Creek

Day 7 Those beginning with this section catch a bus to Coinda. See the note on the previous page for details. On arrival, you can wait in the open air pub and meet the group there or check into budget accommodation saying that you are part of the Willis's Walkabouts group. 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.

Cook-it-yourself barbecue meal in the evening.

Day 8 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. Drive to Dinner Creek. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 9-10 Bush camping, carrying full packs sometimes, day packs at others.

Day 11 Those ending with this section return to Pine Creek where they can catch a late afternoon Greyhound 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 3 Koolpin - Freezing

Day 11 To make the connection, you can catch a morning Greyhound bus to Pine Creek. Check timetable when you book. Any arrival before noon is satisfactory. Those beginning with this section meet group at Hard Rock Café 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. Drive to Koolpin and begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 12-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

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