

Kakadu Highlights No. 3: April 4-17, 2021

Section 1: Baroalba Creek and Radon Gorge: April 4-11

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.



On the marked trail. This is as easy as it gets.



Campsite and pool.

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.

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.



Climbing to a high point for a view.

From the bottom of Radon Gorge, it is a 12 kilometre walk back along the western side of the massif to our vehicle. Camping is not normally permitted in this section so we have to do it in a single day.

Note. Radon Gorge is a particularly sensitive area. We may have to skip this and return the way we came.

This section finishes with a drive to Katherine and a night in accommodation there. If those doing only section one do not wish to go to Katherine, they have the choice of being dropped off at Coinda or Pine Creek.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3
Climate	Level 2-3. Average daytime max 32-33°C (90-92°F), average night min 22-23°C (72-73°F), but it can get much cooler. Generally low humidity. Rain moderately likely but unlikely to last.
Terrain	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>
Vegetation	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.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. Only a very slow group would take longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 2-3. You need to carry 5½ days food. You should bring a light sleeping bag and some sort of light shelter.
Art	This is one of the best areas for Aboriginal art anywhere in Australia.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
Swims	Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	Some stretches of rough terrain. Upper reaches of creeks may not be flowing.
Highlights	Incredible Aboriginal rock art. Rugged rock formations. Scenic views. Good weather. Great swimming holes.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	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: Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge): April 10-17

Tens of thousands of people flock to Nitmiluk (Katherine Gorge) National Park every year. The vast majority spend an hour or two 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.

After spending a night in Katherine, we drive to Nitmiluk and begin our walk, following the marked trail right to the very end and continuing to the top gorge, well beyond where 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 floating our packs across the Katherine River to explore one particularly interesting creek. We will carry day packs some days, full packs others.

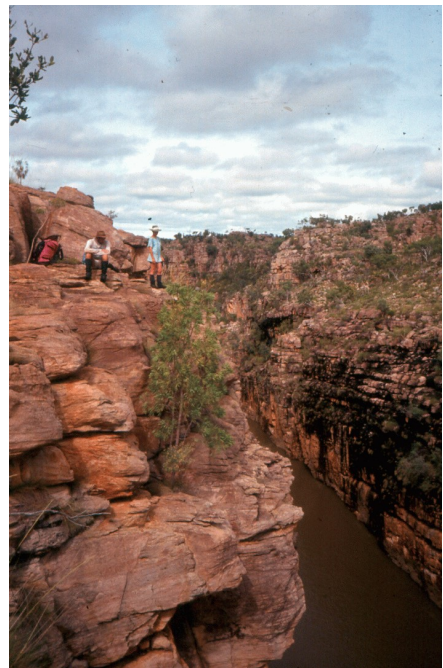
This section is **exploratory**. While we have seen it from the air, we have yet to visit it all on the ground.

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. (If the new cruise timetable does not permit this, we may have to walk.) We then drive back to Darwin, arriving some time in the late afternoon or early evening.

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

Climate	Level 2. Average daytime max 33-34°C (91-93°F), average nighttime min 19-20°C (66-68°F) but it can drop under 10°C (50°F). Low humidity. Rain unlikely but possible.
Terrain	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.
Vegetation	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.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 7½ days food. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Art	We will visit a few art sites we know about and may find others.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
Swims	Good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	Meeting the Katherine Gorge tourists near the end of the walk. Fairly regular helicopter flights overhead when we get down into the main gorge.
Highlights	Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites. Exploring the unknown.
Wildlife	Birds are always present but spread out at this time of year. You are unlikely to see many large animals.
Fishing	Possible. Worth bringing a small handline if you are keen on fishing.



Nitmiluk: Fifth Gorge seen from above.

Notes on Section 2. Scenic helicopter flights are available at Katherine Gorge. The price ranges from about \$130 to over \$200 depending on what itinerary is chosen and on how many people share the flight. Depending on our arrival and departure times, you may have the option of doing a flight either before or after the walk.

We expect 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. Be prepared.

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 in Katherine is included in the price for those doing section 2.

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. 3

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, Double Tree Hilton, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two Double Tree Hiltons next door to each other. The correct one is closer to Daly Street and is the taller of the two. **This meeting is important.** If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance. Both Double Tree hotels were Holiday Inns until early 2013.

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 2-6 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 7 Return to vehicle, drive to Katherine via Pine Creek. Those finishing here can choose to get dropped off at Cooina or Pine Creek if they prefer.

Day 8 Section one participants who have chosen to come to Katherine make their own way back to Darwin or wherever else they might be going.

Section 2 Katherine Gorge and Beyond

Day 7 Those beginning with this section need to make their own way to Katherine to meet the group. They will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance to find out where the group will be staying.
Greyhound has daily bus services between Darwin and Katherine.

Day 8 Drive to Nitmiluk. Begin walk carrying full pack. Bush camp.

Day 9-13 Follow the gorge downstream, exploring one of the major tributaries on the way. Bush camping carrying full packs, possibly day packs some of the time

Day 14 Finish the walk. Return to Darwin, probably arriving late afternoon.