

Kakadu Highlights No. 4: May 16-29, 2021



List price - \$2695 For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts

Summary. Section 1, list price \$1795, takes you into the greatest concentration of Aboriginal rock art we can visit in Kakadu. Good swimming, great views and amazing rock formations.

Section 2, list price \$1895, takes you to some great waterfalls and Aboriginal rock art sites. More great views, great campsites and an amazing swim through cave.

Itinerary Section 1 Baroalba-Radon

Day 0 **This is the day before departure. 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, the taller of the two. **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. 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 Finish walk. Drive to Cooina. If time permits, visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. Bistro meal.

Day 8 Early morning Yellow Waters Cruise. Those ending with this section can catch an AAT Kings bus to Darwin if they have made prior arrangements. Those continuing go straight to Koolpin Creek.

Section 2 Koolpin and Waterfall Creeks

Day 7 Those beginning with this section catch a bus from Darwin to Cooina early in the morning. The cost of getting to Cooina is not included in the cost of the tour.

Check in with reception as the rest of the group is unlikely to arrive until late afternoon. It's only a short walk to the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre, well worth the visit.

Day 8 Early morning Yellow Waters Cruise. Drive to Koolpin and begin walk. Bush camp.

Day 9-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

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



Exploring the cave.

Section 1: Baroalba Creek and Radon Gorge: May 16-23

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



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



Campsite and pool.

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 couple of kilometres over a gentle pass brings us to Radon Creek, the largest in the northern part of the massif. Radon Gorge is steep, narrow, cool and beautiful. Some parts are easy, some are less so as shown in the two photos at left. 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



Climbing to a high point for a view.



below.

From the bottom of Radon Gorge, it is a 12 kilometre walk back along the western side of the massif to our vehicle. Campsites on this section are mediocre at best so we plan to do it in a single day.

There are a few small climbs along the way as well as some normally fairly thick scrub. Even so, we should make it back to the vehicles with plenty of time for the drive to Cooina where we will spend the night between sections. A hot shower, cold drink and comfortable bed makes a good break before we head off for section two.

But, before we head off the next morning, we do the 6:45 am Yellow Waters cruise. This gives you a good view of the Kakadu wetlands, not the best place for a bushwalk, but a wonderful place for birds and other wildlife.

After the cruise, we bid farewell to those leaving and continue our journey. Those leaving need to organise their own transport back to Darwin. Details in the notes.



En route from Radon to Baroalba

Section 2: Koolpin and Waterfall Creeks: May 22-29

Those joining this section will need to make their own way to Cooina to join the group when they arrive after section one.

This walk 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.



First two waterfalls at Koolpin

If the 4WD track to Koolpin Gorge is closed (still possible 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.)



Climbing over the ridge at Koolpin

Saltwater crocodiles have been making their way into lower Koolpin during the wet season in recent years. Unless park management has given the all clear, very unlikely this early, we will have to climb over a ridge and join the creek above the falls. The views are fantastic, but it is strenuous. The photo at left shows the climb. Once we are above the first falls, crocs are no longer a worry and we can swim to our hearts content.

In May, 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.



Koolpin Gorge campsite



Big pool, upper Barramundi

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.



View from the high point between Barramundi and Waterfall Creeks



Looking back, halfway down to the Waterfall Creek plateau

From this area, another climb takes us down past more Aboriginal art and onto the plain above Gunlom Falls. A six kilometre walk past the largest termite mounds we have ever found on the plateau 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.

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 3. It will be warm. It may also be humid although the humidity and temperature normally drop substantially by the end of May. The average daily maximum is 32-33°C (90-91°F). If we get extreme conditions, the temperature could reach 38°C (100°F). The average minimum is 19-22°C (66-71°F). We once had 10°C (50°F) overnight on a May trip. You should be prepared for cool to cold nights. Rain is not very likely but definitely possible.

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 most years, it won't rain a drop.

Terrain Level 3.

Although some sections of these walks 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 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.

But, **being prepared for a pack float** on section one can save two hours of a hard climb.

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 dramatically 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 per day. A few days might be longer.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry a week's food. This will include about 2½-3½ kg of the evening meals.
- Art** These walks include the two greatest concentrations of rock art that are accessible to bushwalkers.
- 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..
- Highlights** Great swimming. Aboriginal art sites. A still green landscape that dry season visitors can only imagine.
- Lowlights** Heat and humidity. Carrying food for a week. Pushing through thick grass.
- 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.



A final swim in our last private pool before joining the tourist track at the very end of the walk

Notes

- 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.
- We may have a two night camp and do a day walk from that camp on section one. If so, a day pack will be useful.
- For those doing only one section, the cost of the bus between Darwin and Cooinda is **not** included in the cost of the tour. At the time these notes were written, the only transport was a seat on an AAT Kings tour bus. Phone (08 8923 6555). Do not try and use the AAT Kings 1300 number to make the booking.
- The scrub on our 2017 Baroalba-Radon trip was thicker than usual. Everyone thought long sleeves and long trousers would have been a good idea.
- Being prepared for a pack float on section one can save a **lot** of effort.
- 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 at this time of year.
- It is conceivable that we will be able to provide transport in both directions for those doing one section. Please contact us before booking a bus.

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

Cooinda and Warradjan

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 approach the wildlife (especially birds and crocodiles) much closer than you could do on foot. 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.

Warradjan and Cooinda both 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.

Note. During the dry season, the accommodation is fairly costly. The campground is comfortable and the showers clean with plenty of hot water. To keep our prices as low as possible, we have included the campground fee but not included accommodation on the night between sections. Please ask us if you would like to upgrade. The cost will be the cost of the room less the camping fee.