

Kakadu Highlights No. 7: August 9-22, 2020

Section 1: Graveside – Surprise: August 9-19

This walk combines a portion of our normal Graveside route, part of our Kakadu Circle route and a gorge which we do not visit on any other trip. You see a variety of landscapes, deep gorges, beautiful swimming pools and cascades as well as a number of little known Aboriginal art sites.

The drive from Darwin to the start of the walk is over 300 kilometres, including about 45 kilometres on a 4WD track which is so rough that it can take over two hours on its own. From the parking area, a relatively flat walk of about eight kilometres brings us to the entrance to a magnificent little gorge. A delightful walk through the gorge brings us to the top of the plateau for a short walk across to where we can look out across the plains toward the escarpment. We work our way down to Surprise Creek and make our way up to the base of Surprise Falls. Another climb brings us to our camp site next to the pools at the top of the falls where we enjoy excellent views down the valley.



Surprise Falls swim stop.



Upper Graveside rock formation

From Surprise, we continue across the plateau, passing through the largest patch of open country rainforest in the park and across the upper reaches of Koolpin Creek. When we reach Graveside Creek, we find a number of interesting rocky areas. Some contain Aboriginal art sites. We will take our time and have a good look to see if we can add to those we already know.

We make our way down the creek to the top of Graveside Gorge where a double waterfall drops 100 metres into a pool in the gorge below. Depending on how

much time we have left, we may simply drop down into the gorge, spend a day exploring and return to the vehicle or we may move over to Cascades Creek and follow that route.

If we drop down into the gorge, we will find that it actually consists of two separate gorges, both full of lush, shady vegetation and cool, inviting pools.



Age 8 or 80, almost no one we've taken past the slide can resist having at least one go. Most have several.

The alternative, Cascades Creek, is reached by an easy four kilometre walk across the plateau to a small waterfall and the first of many pools and art sites. The walk down the four kilometre gorge is a slow one. 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. (You can waterproof your pack by lining it with two garbage bags, one inside the other. On many trips, some people choose to swim while others choose to climb.)



The pool above the main Graveside falls isn't very wide, but it is very deep.

The pools and art sites are too nice to pass by, so stops are frequent as we make our way down to the cascades for which the creek is named. The last 500 metres often takes two hours or more as the deep pools and a natural water slide are much too inviting to rush past.

A relatively flat walk on the final full day brings us back to the vehicle. We then drive out to Cooina to meet those who are joining the trip for the second section. We then visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre and, if time permits we might go to Nourlangie Rock or just relax or whatever the group wishes.

The day finishes with a bistro meal at the resort and a night in their campground. Accommodation is available at an additional charge. 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. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas but is not suitable for navigation.

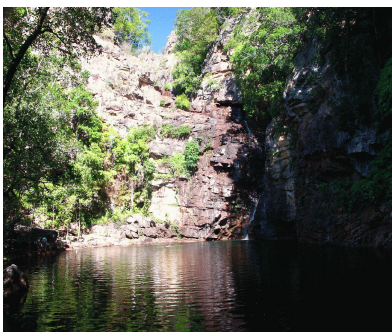
Terrain and difficulty

Overall	Level 3.
Climate	Level 3. The average maximum temperature is 32-34°C. And the average nightly minimum is about 17-19°C. It is, however, not uncommon for the temperature to drop as low as 10°C (50°F). Occasionally it goes lower still. Sleeping bags are essential. Rain is highly unlikely.
Terrain	Level 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.
Packs	Pack weight - level 3. You need to carry 9 days food. This will include about 2-3 kg of the evening meals. You need a sleeping bag but are unlikely to need a tent.
Vegetation	Level 2-3. 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. At this time of year, the spear grass has finished seeding and dried out.
Hours	Generally 4-6 hours. One or two days might be longer.
Art	We visit a variety of art sites, some of which are in excellent condition.
Campsites	Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are excellent. You are unlikely to see anyone else at most of the campsites.
Swims	Most creeks are still flowing well and the swimming is excellent. We will have good pools at almost every campsite and lunch spot.
Lowlights	The very long drive to the start of the walk.
Highlights	Perfect weather. Great swimming holes. Aboriginal art sites.
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.

Note for section one. Many groups do the walk in the reverse direction. The guide will make the decision based on the conditions at the time.

The 4WD access track will be closed the day after we arrive so we are unlikely to see anyone else.

Section 2: Dinner Creek: August 18-22



Main falls & pool, Dinner Creek.

This section overlaps the first and includes the bistro meal, night at Cooina and Yellow Waters cruise. If seats are limited, those who have done the first section have priority.

The drive from Cooina to the start of the walk is more than 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.

Unlike the rest of the pools we find on this section, this first pool could conceivably be home to a large crocodile so we continue up the main gorge to a base camp, a shady area next to another refreshing pool. No crocs here so swimming is fine.

Dinner Creek is an environmentally sensitive area so group size may be 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.



High view, Dinner Creek

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. No photo can possibly do it justice, so we will not publish one, either in our trip notes or on our website.

For more information about Dinner Creek see www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/kurrundie.shtml#dinner If that doesn't take you straight to the Dinner Creek section, scroll down the page.

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)

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.

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

Notes for both sections

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.

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 during the journey.

Those doing both sections will have to carry only what they need on each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in the vehicle during the walks.

On the evening where we eat in a restaurant, your meal is included in the trip price. Your drinks are not.

Terrain and difficulty - General Information

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. 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 either section is more of an endurance test than the pleasure most people experience. Although both walks are level three, the lighter pack and shorter duration on section two make somewhat easier.

Itinerary: Kakadu Highlights No. 7

Note 1 Day 0 is the day before departure.

Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.

Section 1 Graveside-Surprise

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, 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 alternative arrangements at the pre-trip meeting. Otherwise, pick up is from the Mitchell Street Tourist Precinct at 69 Mitchell Street. Drive to Kakadu. Begin walk carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 2–9 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 10 Return to car. Drive to Cooinda

Day 11 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise. Trip finishes. Those ending here catch a tour bus back to Darwin.

Section 2 Dinner Creek

Day 10 Those beginning with this section catch a bus to Cooinda. The cost of getting to Cooinda is not included in the cost of the tour. At the time these notes were written, the only way to get to Cooinda was on an AAT Kings tour. (You could book the transport without the tour.) (08 8923 6555).

Day 11 6.45 a.m. Yellow Waters Cruise.
Drive to Dinner Creek. Begin walk, carrying full packs. Bush camp.

Day 12-13 Bush camping, carrying full packs sometimes, day packs at others.

Day 14 Walk back to the main track and back to the vehicle(s). Return to Darwin, drop off at your accommodation sometime that evening.