

Kakadu Highlights No. 3: 4-17 April 2027



List price - \$5395 For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/discounts

Summary. This trip combines Baroalba Creek in Kakadu with the NE Section of Judbarra/Gregory National Park. Few trips can offer such variety in such a short time.

Itinerary **Section 1 Baroalba Creek** **List Price - \$2795**

Day 0 **This is the day before departure. Pre-trip meeting, 6.30 p.m., Pool Side Bar & Restaurant, Hilton Gardens, 122 The Esplanade.** There are two 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 7 to 8 a.m. pick up as arranged at the pre-trip meeting. Drive to Kakadu. There will be a stop along the way to buy drinks, etc.
Begin the walk. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 2-5 Bush camping, carrying full packs.

Day 6 Finish walk. Drive to Cooinda. If time permits, visit the Warradjan Aboriginal Cultural Centre. Bistro meal (Bring cash or card, meal not included in the price)

Day 7 Early morning Yellow Waters Cruise. Those ending with this section can catch an AAT Kings bus to Darwin if they have made prior arrangements. Otherwise, we can drop them off in Pine Creek or Katherine.
Those continuing go straight to Victoria River.

Section 2 NE Gregory National Park **List price - \$3095**

Day 6 Those beginning with this section have the option of meeting the group at Cooinda the night before the trip departs. If you wish to do this, you will need to contact the Walkabouts office well in advance. The cost of the Yellow Waters cruise is not included in section 2.

Day 7 Section two begins. Pick up at the Katherine Visitors Centre on the corner of Lindsay Street and the Stuart Highway for those beginning with this section, early afternoon. The Greyhound bus from Darwin normally arrives just after 2 PM. We can wait until 3:30 PM, but if the bus is running very late you might miss the connection unless you come down a day early.
Drive to the Victoria River Roadhouse. Pub meal. (Bring cash or card, meal not included in the price) Overnight in campground or in accommodation. Extra charge for those choosing accommodation.

Day 8 Drive to the start and begin walk. A car shuffle may add a bit of extra time. Bush camp, carrying full packs.

Day 9-13 Bush camps, carrying full packs. We may choose to return to the vehicle on the final night.

Day 14 Return to vehicles if we have not already done so. Drive to Darwin via Katherine (about 500 km). Drop off at your accommodation, late afternoon or early evening.

Now for the details

Section 1: 4-10 April

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.



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.



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

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.

There are two routes to our preferred campsite. A relatively easy one through mostly open country along a small tributary and a small, more strenuous one through a monsoon forest patch along the boulder strewn main creek. Monsoon forest is too rare an environment to miss so we'll go up one and down the other. Which is which will depend on the time we arrive.



Going up the creek requires some serious rock scrambling in places



Creek crossing in the monsoon forest



Monsoon forest camp

The three photos above give you a taste of what it is like, deep shade, lots of rock hopping with some serious scrambles near the bottom. The pools are smaller than the ones upstream but we sometimes camp in the forest just to enjoy such a different environment.

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. A few energetic groups choose to carry water and camp on a high point.

Some of our campsites will be on flat rock and some on sand. The photos at right show a campsite we use on most trips. On the final day, we return to the walking track, hike back to the vehicles and drive to Cooina.



Sandy campsite



Relaxing at sunset above the campsite at left.

On our final morning in Kakadu, we do the 6:45 am Yellow Waters cruise. This gives you a good view of the Kakadu wetlands, a wonderful place for birds and other wildlife.

After the cruise, we drive to Katherine via Pine Creek. Those leaving need to organise their own transport back to Darwin from Cooina, Katherine or Pine Creek. Details in the notes section.

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 1. 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 have not included accommodation. Please ask us if you would like to upgrade. The cost will be the cost of the room less the camping fee.

Note 2. In recent years, Cooinda has had a special offer for people doing a second cruise. If you are at all interested in birds, we recommend adding the 4:30 PM cruise on the afternoon we arrive. Please let us know well in advance if you would like us to book this for you.

Section 2: NE Judbarra/Gregory National Park 10-17 April

Judbarra/Gregory is one of the largest yet least known national parks in the NT. It lies about halfway between Katherine and Kununurra and contains several creek systems where large permanent pools and shady rock shelters can be found in the depths of sheer, red-walled gorges. The southern and western parts of the park are a paradise for four wheel drivers. (They also have some interesting bushwalks.) On this trip, we will stick to the northeast corner, highlighted on the map at right. It may look small, but you need to remember that the road distance from Katherine to Victoria river is 200 km.

You can find more information about the park at <https://nt.gov.au/leisure/parks-reserves/find-a-park/find-a-park-to-visit/judbarra-gregory-national-park>



The park info says no swimming. True enough near the tracks where most people go, but swimming is safe along most of our route.

On this trip, we plan to do a loop along Matt Wilson and Ryan Creeks in the northeast section of the park. This area contains some of the most spectacular cliffs in the park. We do not visit it on any of our other Gregory trips. The beginning of the walk depends on the level of the Victoria River. If the river is low enough to walk across at the old crossing, we will do so and save a half day's walk. If not, we have to start from the Katherine side of the Victoria Bridge and walk from there.



Judbarra/Gregory swim

The terrain here is more open and flatter than in Litchfield. There are lots of boabs. In 2019, the group saw numerous freshwater crocs. Somehow they have coped with cane toads better here than in Kakadu or Litchfield. While they are crocodiles, unless you actively provoke them, they are harmless.

As we work our way up the valley, we sometimes drop our packs and do an exploration of a side gorge.

Eventually, we climb up out of the Matt Wilson Valley and cross the plateau heading west toward Ryan Creek. We find a number of high, shallow gorges on the small creeks that feed into Ryan Creek.



Matt Wilson campsite

Some of the walking is fairly easy. Some has thick scrub and is quite slow. Gregory is much drier than Kakadu or Litchfield so there aren't a huge number of waterholes on the small creeks, but occasionally we even find a small flowing waterfall like the one shown below.



Once we reach the main creek, the going gets easier and the views more spectacular. As we continue the gorges get deeper. Walking on the top is fairly easy but some of the side gorges are deep enough so that we have to drop down to the main creek or contour well around. There isn't a lot of difficult terrain, but as the middle photo below shows, there is some.



Eventually, we return to where we began, climb into the vehicle and begin the 530 km drive back to Darwin. (Some groups prefer to finish on the second last day and camp en route to Darwin.)

Terrain and Difficulty

Overall Level 3

Climate Level 3. It will be hot. It may also be humid although the humidity and temperature normally begin to drop substantially in April. In Jabiru, the closest weather station to section one, the average daily maximum is 34½°C (94°F). If we get extreme conditions, the temperature could reach 38°C (100°F). The average minimum is 23½°C (74°F). It has been recorded as low as 16°C (61°F) overnight in April. In Timber Creek, the closest weather station to section two, the corresponding temperatures are 35°C (95°F), 40°C (104°F), 21°C (70°F) and 11°C (52°F).

Rain is fairly likely on section one, less so on section two. The humidity on section two is normally about 10% less than on section one.

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.



Baroalba. Climbing to a high point for a view.

The creeks should be low enough so that swimming across with packs will not be necessary. Exceptional rain could cause this to change.

Except for a very short section at the start and finish of section one, 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 here 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 enjoy.

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. Wildflowers remain prolific.



Grassy area, Judbarra/Gregory

Hours Generally 4-6 hours per day. A few days might be longer.



Kapok bush, common throughout the Top End



Utricularia fulva, a bladderwort common at this time of year



Photographing a Kurrajong, Gregory

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 late 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 but are likely to see many small ones.
Fishing	Not permitted on section one. Possible on parts of section two.
Map	Section 1: 1:50,000 Nourlangie Creek. The 1:250 000 Kakadu park map shows all areas but is not suitable for navigation. Section 2: 1:50 000 Ryan Creek and Sullivan Creek



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.
- For those doing only one section, the cost of the bus between Darwin and a connection point is **not** included in the cost of the tour. Possible connection points are Cooinda, Pine Creek and Katherine. Pine Creek and Katherine are served by a daily Greyhound bus service. At the time these notes were written, the only transport to Cooinda was a seat on an AAT Kings tour bus. That may or may not still be possible. If only one section runs, we will provide all transport.
- We are likely to have a two night camp and do a day walk from that camp. If so, a day pack will be useful.
- 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.
- You will need money for drinks, etc at Cooinda, Victoria River and other stops along the way.
- Exceptionally severe flooding is unlikely but conceivable at this time of year.
- Camping fees are included at Cooinda and Victoria River. You can upgrade to a room for an additional cost.