

# Bushwalking in Kakadu

## Kakadu Draft Tourism Plan:

Section 5.5.1 Bushwalking is printed in full below.

Outstanding bushwalking opportunities in Kakadu exist for the target market. There are many walks throughout the park, including a wide variety of short and easy day walks as well as some longer, more challenging full day walks for those who want a higher level of difficulty. Extended overnight walks are also available, however, these require a high level of experience and are far more physically demanding.

There are some constraints to the promotion of extended bushwalking and these include:

- Traditional owners have expressed concern about people walking on country due to the sensitive nature of some parts of country containing sacred sites which have strict rules about who may go to these areas. These areas have restricted access and should not be accessible to bushwalkers. This is often difficult to regulate and relies on the good will of the bushwalkers.
- Kakadu offers a range of bushwalking landscapes, including terrain which varies from flat open areas to uneven ground covered with dense vegetation and steep, rocky slopes. Navigational experience is essential, and walkers need to be physically fit and adequately prepared to take into consideration the varying seasonal conditions and potential safety risks.
- Existing bushwalking opportunities are limited to experienced walkers who know the approved routes. These routes are generally located in the Mt Brockman Massif and escarpment areas and Yurmikmik and Jarrangbarnmi (Koolpin Gorge) areas.

The following approach is proposed for discussion in regard to classification of bushwalks to assist in streamlining the current process. It will require:

- review and revision of the bushwalking strategy
- regular monitoring and review of walking track classifications with the involvement of traditional owners
- development of an internet based, efficient and customer focussed bushwalking permit system
- possible certification of experienced walkers (via clubs) to walk in more remote areas of the park with alternative of induction and planning system for independent walkers.

The above is part of what the plan says. There is more. Have a look at the full report if you are interested. See [www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/kakadu/draft-tourism-plan.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/kakadu/draft-tourism-plan.html)  
A few additional comments are in order.

## Bushwalking Safety

- **Culture.** The Aboriginal traditional owners of the park are very concerned about visitor safety. In their culture, if someone has an accident on their land, no matter what that person has done, it is in some way their fault. This point cannot be argued. The best that bushwalkers can do is to ensure that their walks are as safe as possible.

- **Expense.** Search and rescue operations cost a lot of money. Park management has a limited budget and feels that they cannot afford to spend big dollars on rescues they think are not justified. There have been a number of cases where EPIRBs have been set off where the park authorities felt that the groups concerned could reasonably have been expected to cope with by themselves. If this continues, further restrictions are inevitable.
- **Satellite phones.** You can currently hire a satellite phone in Darwin for \$18 per day. Some have suggested that carrying a satellite phone become mandatory, at least for large groups where the cost per person is not significant. I would personally support this if I thought it would prevent additional restrictions being imposed.
- **Closing areas to the public – an example.** Walking down to the different levels at the top of Twin Falls used to be permitted. A number of accidents, including one fatality, led the traditional owners to ask that the area be closed. After lengthy discussions with the tourist industry and bushwalkers, a number of restrictions were put in place which allowed this to continue. When people ignored those restrictions, the area was closed. If it could happen in one area, it can happen in others.

## **Bushwalking and Managing the Land**

- In recent years, increasing numbers of the traditional owners have been bushwalking in the park and taking a more active, on-the-ground role in managing the park.
- Some trips are specifically to check out the approved bushwalking routes and to see how they are standing up to the use they get.
- Some trips are for things like fire management. On a trip in 2007, a group I was leading met a group of Aboriginal rangers who were doing controlled burns on the ground rather than having someone drop fire bombs from the air as had been done in the past. Having people on the ground who can assess the exact conditions is far more likely to help preserve the existing flora and fauna than what has been done in the past. It is even conceivable that outside bushwalkers may be allowed to or even asked to assist in this.

## **Have your say.**

- Bushwalkers in Kakadu are a part of tourism in the park. You can comment on the Draft Tourism Plan by emailing [kakadu.tmp@environment.gov.au](mailto:kakadu.tmp@environment.gov.au) or post your comments to the Tourism and Visitor Services Manager, Kakadu National Park, PO Box 71, JABIRU NT 0886. **Submissions close at the close of business on Tuesday 30 September.**
- The Kakadu Tourism Consultative Committee reports directly to the Kakadu Board of Management. Their next meeting is in November. As the main bushwalking tour operator as well as being a member of the Darwin Bushwalking Club, I sit on the Committee as the bushwalking representative. If you have particular concerns, I will be happy to raise them at the meeting.

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