

THE JATBULA TRAIL

20 – 26 June 2012

Excitement rippled through each one of us as we settled into the boat which ferried us over the Katherine River in the NT - the long-anticipated Jatbula Trek was about to begin. And yes what played out over the next six days fully justified our initial sentiments. It was indeed a rich and rewarding experience for us all.

Who could not relish pitching a tent at places whose magical names were Biddlecombe Cascades, Crystal Falls, Seventeen Mile Falls, Sandy Camp Pool and Sweetwater Pool?



Biddlecombe Cascades



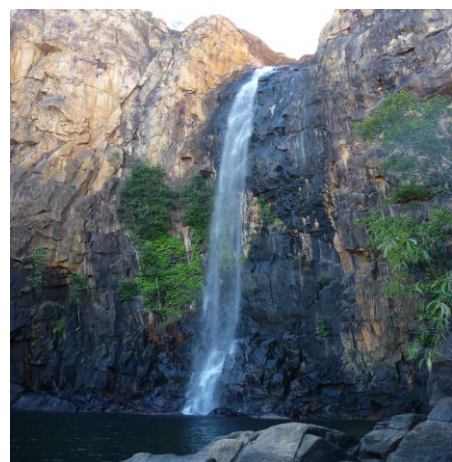
Eucalyptus miniata

Who could not but bask in the picture-perfect weather during those six days of walking with sunny days, cosy nights and crisp mornings? And what picturesque scenery greeted us around many corners - the clear running creeks (ideal too for the swimmers amongst us), the magnificent waterfalls (brought about by a good earlier wet season), painted finches, masses of eucalypts dropping orange blossoms at the side of the track, and fields of deep pink flowering grevilleas.

In stark contrast, the areas which had been controlled-burnt along the track hinted at a harsher environment in the heat and dryness of the pre-wet season.



Burnt countryside



Northern Rockhole

A visit to the Amphitheatre on the Jatbula Trail is a must for those walkers interested in aboriginal art.

And lastly, but most importantly, what wonderful company. Over the six days of walking, the "group of eight" teamed together well in all aspects of the trip –supporting one another and sharing stories and songs.

A big thank you from Robyn, Deborah, Cindi, Rod, Ron, John and Barbara to our leader, Cheryl for organising the trip so smoothly.

This comfortable walk is an ideal way for a beginner like myself to start "through walking". It has certainly spurred me on to try another in the not-so-distant future.

Barbara

And here is another report of the Jatbula Track from a fellow walker – Rod O'Mara from the Gladstone Bushwalkers.

JATBULA TRACK

When I go walking, I don't look for highlights. Just being out in the bush is enough to make it all worthwhile. However, if I were to choose, the best parts of the Jatbula they would be Sandy Camp Pool and the Amphitheatre.

The country we walked through was mainly dry; not desert, but dry. And a lot of it had been burnt, probably only a month or so before we were there. We walked mainly on the plateau, in the first 4 days, at least, and came down to the creeks in the evenings. So any waterholes were particularly significant, as it is in all of arid Australia.

Sandy Camp Pool, where we had our rest day (so we stayed 2 nights) was the biggest pool on the walk. And, as the name suggests, it had a large sandy area where the campsite was. The area had been washed clean of debris (or so it appeared) in the last wet season floods, so we had a large area to choose from to camp on. And the pool was big enough to invite us to walk right round it, which took over an hour, allowing time to find a way across the creek further down. It was a very restful place.

The Amphitheatre was a gorge we entered from above, so again we came down off the dry plateau into an area with water, cool and protected from the hot sun above. We had lunch there, in the shade by the running creek.

There was more rock art than I had ever seen in one place. And it was of much greater variety, too. The people who did it must have travelled widely, because there were large fish portrayed that I would expect to be sea fish, not freshwater fish from the fairly small creeks in the area. And turtles. There were full size human portraits, and smaller ones, some very explicit. I gather their beliefs were that this encourages fertility in the food plants and animals.

Thank you, Cheryl, for the organisation, and Ian, for the transport, and everyone else for your company. I really enjoyed the walk.

Rod O'Mara