

ABOVE Not only beautiful, the lotus flower, seen here in Kakadu National Park, is a source of food for Indigenous peoples.

LEFT Mount Borradaile in Arnhem Land, in the Northern Territory, encompasses a series of catacomb-like caves which can easily become a maze for the unwary.



Paperbarks line Yellow Water Billabong, Kakadu National Park, Northern Territory.

Mount Borradaile

I have been fortunate to visit Kakadu many times over the 30-plus years I have been photographing around Australia. It's a terrific place, with a rich Indigenous history, billabongs full of crocs, and really beautiful scenery, and it's justifiably well known. But a few years ago I came across another place, not too far away, that is even better, in so many ways.

Mount Borradaile lies to the north of Kakadu, in Arnhem Land. To get there you either fly in direct from Jabiru or Darwin, or, with pre-arranged permission, drive across East Alligator Creek at Cahills Crossing, take a left just past Oenpelli (Gunbalanya) and follow a reasonable track for about 40 kilometres. This will take you to Davidson's Safari Camp at Mount Borradaile, a multi award-winning, eco-style lodge with all modern conveniences, including air-con cabins and excellent meals, and a superb setting.

Regardless of whether you fly in or drive in, you will be shown around by guides, sometimes in classic old Land Rovers, sometimes in purpose-built flat-

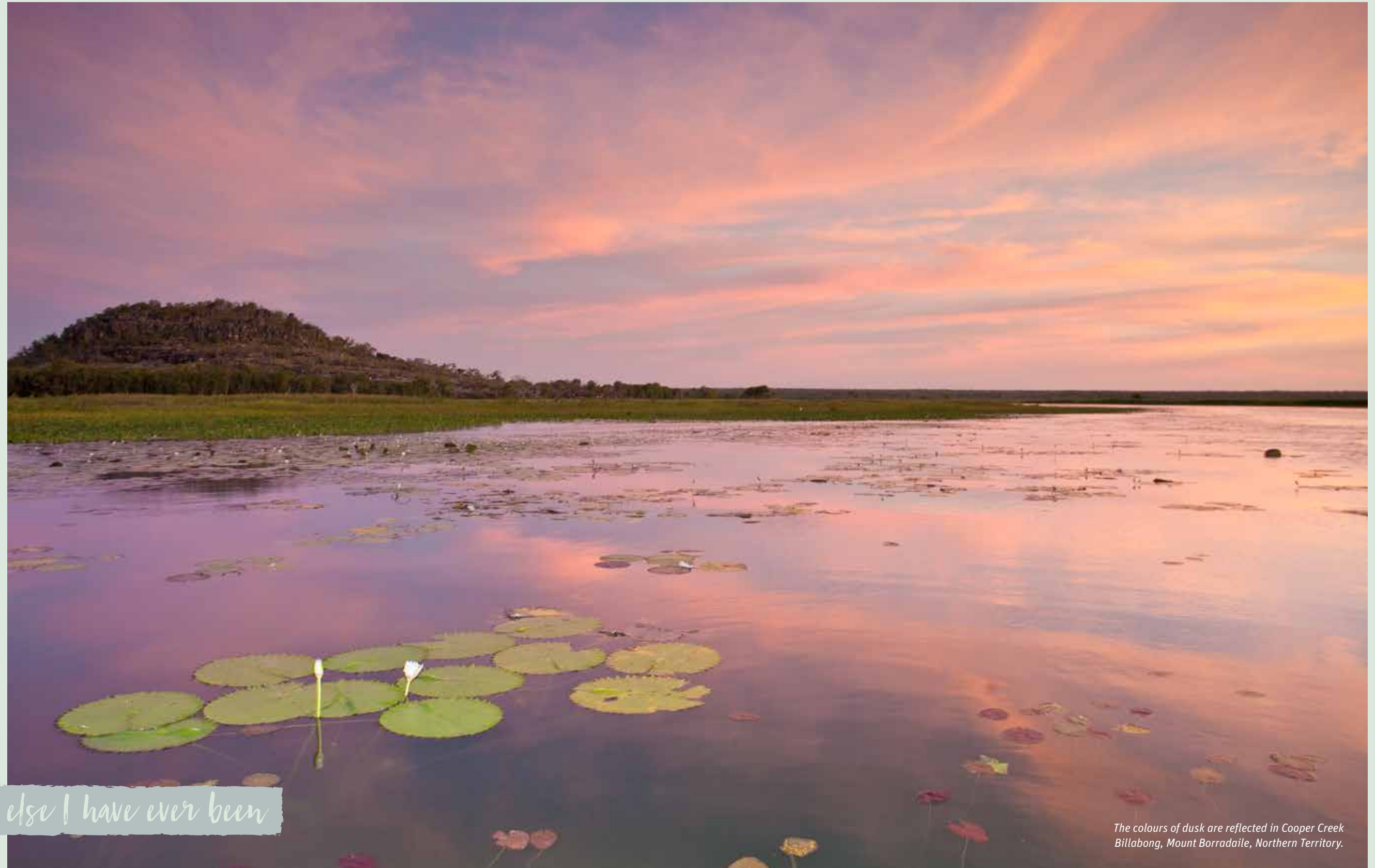
hulled boats, and at other times on foot. All of this is included in the tariff.

That this 'camp' is here is down to one man, Max Davidson, who was approached by the traditional owners of the area to set up and run a premium tourism operation within Arnhem Land, a seldom-visited part of the Northern Territory. Max is an honorary custodian of this land and has had a long relationship with the local people – his knowledge of the local flora and fauna is second to none.

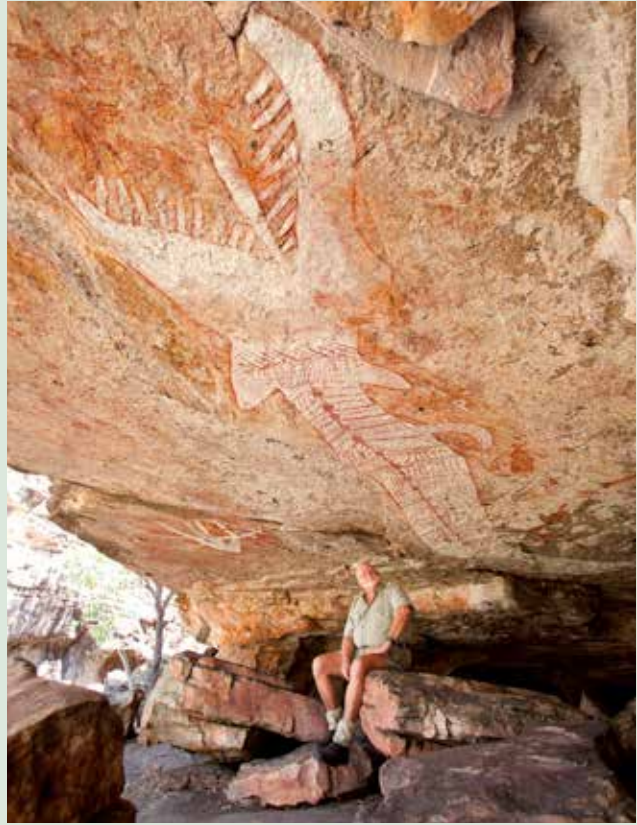
The reason people come to Mount Borradaile is not for the cabins or the cooking, excellent as they are, but for the scenery, the wildlife and the rock art. Having seen these things for myself I can tell you from the heart that they are well worth the trip.

Mount Borradaile itself looms over a huge billabong on Cooper Creek, and drifting along in a small boat at dawn, listening to the incredible range of birdcalls, is an otherworldly experience. You'll see red-kneed storks (jabirus), egrets, herons, jacanas and many other wetland birds, both migratory and

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The colours of dusk are reflected in Cooper Creek Billabong, Mount Borradaile, Northern Territory.



resident. There are more crocs per square metre than anywhere else I have ever been, and it's not unusual to be able to get quite close to a 4-metre croc sunning itself on a riverbank.

Best of all, just south of the billabong is a region of rocky catacombs with some of the best rock art you'll ever see, and it's right there in front of you – there are no railings, signs or boardwalks, so you get to enjoy a fully open and authentic experience.

ABOVE Max Davidson guides visitors around the art sites at Mount Borradaile, including this giant Rainbow Serpent.

RIGHT Layers of art, created over hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years, decorate the main art site.





ABOVE The author takes aim at wildlife at Cooper Creek Billabong (photo by Bors Vesterby).

TOP A great egret searches for food among the water lilies.

RIGHT A saltwater crocodile 'gapes' in order to warm up in the early-morning sun.





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT
A plumed whistling duck takes to the air; a snake-necked darter dries its wings in the sun; rock grevillea creates bright splashes of colour in the grasslands; a rare Leichhardt's grasshopper feeds on a shrub; jacanas are famous for their ability to 'walk on water' by stepping from one lily pad to another; brolgas are among the largest bird species found at Mount Borradaile; danger, in the form of the fearsome saltwater crocodile, lurks everywhere in the billabongs.



Cloud-dotted skies are mirrored by the still waters of Cooper Creek Billabong.