

West Macdonnell Ranges: June 4-17, 2022

List price - \$2495 Special price, see details at end. For information about our advance purchase and other discounts, see our discount page, www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au/prices.shtml

Summary. On and off the Larapinta Trail. The Larapinta is a magnificent walk but by going off the trail, we show you wonderful places the trail walkers will never know. The trip is divided into two sections, either of which can be done on its own. Most of the walking is done with a full pack but there should be at least one day walk from a base camp on each section.

Itinerary

- Note 1** Day 0 is the day before departure
Note 2 This itinerary is subject to change.



On the Larapinta Trail.

Section 1 Larapinta East and More

List price: \$1350

- Day 0** Pre-trip meeting at 6.30 p.m, outside (weather permitting) at the Todd Tavern in the Todd Mall. This meeting is important. If you cannot make the meeting, please advise us well in advance.
- Day 1** 8 a.m. pick up as arranged at the pre-trip meeting. Drive to start, begin walk. Vehicle returns to Alice Springs.
Bush camp.
- Day 2–6** Bush camping. Carrying full packs most days, possibly day packs on others.
- Day 7** Meet pick up vehicle. Drive to the start of section two. Those finishing at the end of this section will then be driven back to Alice Springs and can be dropped off anywhere in town.

Section 2 Larapinta West and More

List price: \$1495

- Day 7** Those joining will be picked up from their accommodation. This **must** be arranged well before section one departs. Drive to start of walk. Drop off and walk to campsite. Vehicle returns to Alice Springs. Bush camp.
- Day 8-13** Bush camping. Carrying full packs some days, day packs on others.
- Day 14** Finish walk and meet vehicle. Return to Alice Springs. Drop off at your accommodation late, afternoon.

Now for the details.

Section 1: Larapinta East and More: June 4-10

Brinkley Bluff, Spencer Gorge, Hugh Gorge — these are the main places we have been visiting on our Larapinta East trips for the past ten years. There are so many possible variations that no two of our groups have ever followed the exact same route. Our basic walk will be as follows.



Birthday Waterhole campsite.

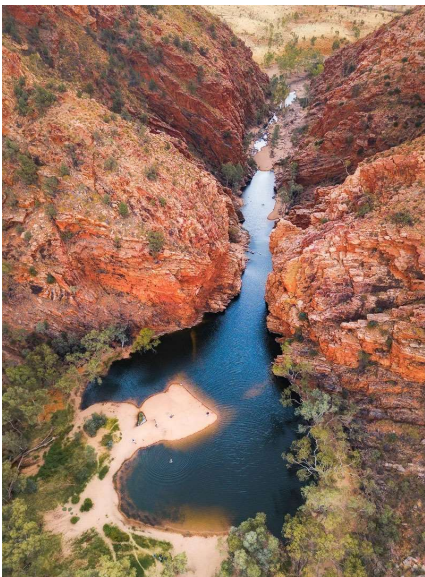


Studying the map on Brinkley Bluff.

We begin with a short drive from Alice Springs to Standley Chasm where, if we're early enough we may find lots of wallabies grazing around the camping area. They're not tame, but bold enough for you to get a good photo.

At Standley, we join the Larapinta Trail and head west toward a place the locals call Birthday Waterhole. It is a fairly long walk so we may camp along the way. One of the highlights – and the high point – on this section is the view from the top of Brinkley Bluff.

We then walk to and through Hugh Gorge with its huge cliffs, pretty pools, and pleasant camp sites. Although well known to local bushwalkers, Hugh Gorge remains almost untouched by the masses of tourists that visit the more accessible gorges in the Macdonnells.



Aerial view, Ellery Creek Big Hole

Depending on how fast we are moving, we may detour into Spencer and Paisley Gorges along the way. Paisley is one of the narrowest and most spectacular cycad gorges in the centre.

From the bottom of Hugh Gorge, it's a two day walk to Ellery Creek Big Hole where we meet the vehicle bringing in our food drop plus anyone joining us for section two. Those doing only section one will be driven back to Alice Springs after the others are dropped off.

Notes on section 1. Water supplies and/or the fitness and interests of the group may be such that we decide to do a loop walk as we have done in previous years. This is a less strenuous option where a portion of the walking is done without full packs.



Enjoying an off-trail view near Birthday

We may do the walk in the reverse direction.

Section 2: Larapinta West and More: June 10-17

Unless there is a severe drought, we will do this walk as a single through walk from Serpentine Chalet to Ormiston Gorge.

From Ellery Creek we are driven to Serpentine Chalet where we rejoin the Larapinta Trail. We follow the trail through Inarlanga Pass, then leave it and head off into the wild.

Our destination is a campsite near a hidden spring — one of the wonders of the Centre. A small, near-permanent creek flows about a kilometre through a small gorge lined with ferns and sundews. While we can collect water here, we can't camp too close to the waterhole as the wildlife needs it too. It's too nice to leave without a good look so we spend part of the next day exploring the gorge and the surrounding ranges without full packs.



Permanent water, ferns & cycads, a wonderful oasis in the arid zone.

From here, we trek west toward Mt Giles where we camp near a small spring close to its base ranges.



Approaching the summit of Mount Giles.

If the weather permits, a day walk without full packs gets us to the top of Giles for what may be the best views in the ranges. If the group is feeling **very** ambitious, we can carry full packs to the top and walk along a high ridge to where we drop down to Bowmans Gap. We know people who have done it but, to date, none of our groups has tried.

There is a much flatter and easier route through the valley that takes us to Bowmans Gap. Here, if the weather is warm, we can enjoy a swim in one of the largest and warmest semi-permanent waterholes in the Macdonnells. Hidden away nearby is a deep gorge cutting through the range, a perfect spot for a day walk.



Hilltop view near Bowmans Gap.

We may spend two nights at Bowmans before heading to Ormiston Gorge. If the water levels are low enough, we may walk to the top of the gorge and then through it. If they are a bit higher, we might have to float our packs a short distance. If the pool is really big, we may have to detour out via the track that comes through a pass upstream of the gorge. We can't know the water levels far in advance so we can't be sure what our final choice will be.

We meet the vehicle that will take us back to Alice Springs sometime in the afternoon, arriving back in town late afternoon or early evening.

Terrain and difficulty

Overall Level 3. As described, section one is more strenuous than section two.

Climate Average daytime max 20°C, average nighttime min 4-5°C. Night temperatures can drop below freezing. Generally low humidity. Rain very unlikely but if we do get rain, it will be cold. You need to be prepared.

Terrain Level 3.

Section 1. Even if we choose the easiest possible routes, the pack carrying portion of this section will include several moderately steep climbs and a substantial amount of rock hopping along creek beds. Most groups prefer to take a more strenuous and steeper path in order to enjoy the better views from on high. In some areas the spinifex is dense enough to make heavy gaiters and long trousers essential.

Section 2. The pack carrying portion of this section normally includes only moderate climbs without much thick spinifex. However, the walk across the Alice Valley contains several of these climbs and is long and rugged. Day walks can be quite long and quite steep.

Vegetation Level 1-2. Varies from year to year depending on when last burnt. Vegetation usually presents very little problem but, in some areas the spinifex may be dense enough to make heavy gaiters and long trousers essential.



Sunrise, Bowmans Gap.

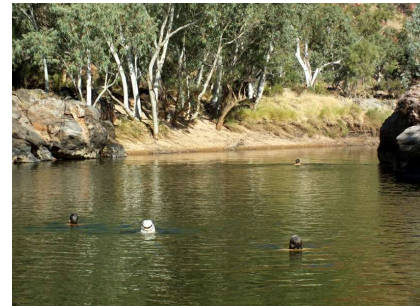


Walking through spinifex going toward Mt Giles

- Hours** Generally 4-6 hours. A few days might be longer.
- Packs** **Pack weight** - level 3. You need to carry 7 days food. You need both a sleeping bag and a tent. You should also carry rain gear. The popularity of some of the campsites on section one means that firewood may be scarce so we will carry a stove and fuel. In exceptionally dry conditions, we may have to do this on section two as well.
- Some groups choose to spend one or two nights camped on high spots so they can enjoy the incredible sunset and sunrise views. The extra water necessary for this means that your pack may be extra heavy for a short period.
- Art** Little or none.
- Campsites** Mix of sand and rock ledges. Most sites are good to excellent. There is likely to be an option to camp on a highpoint for sunrise and sunset views. You are unlikely to see anyone else at many of the campsites.
- Swims** Swimming is likely to be possible but very cold at some camp sites.
- Lowlights** You are likely to see other walkers on parts of section one and will almost certainly meet some fairly large groups at the more popular spots like Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge.
- Highlights** Spectacular mountain views. Deep gorges.
- Wildlife** Birds are always present but you are unlikely to see many large animals. You will almost certainly see wallabies at Standley Chasm and, if you keep your eyes open, you have a good chance to see rock wallabies in some of the other gorges.
- Fishing** No.
- Maps** **Section 1:** 1:50 000 Brinkley and Chewings
1:100 000 000: West Macdonnell National Park, map 2.
Section 2: 1:100 000 West Macdonnell National Park, map 1.
The 1:100 000 West Macdonnell National Park maps are the best available maps of some of the areas where we will be walking. One side is a standard topographic map; the other is an aerial photo. The combination is far better than anything that was available before.



Ormiston Creek campsite.



Swimming at Bowmans Gap



Budgerigars nesting in Ormiston Pound after recent rain

Notes for both sections

The outline above is subject to change depending on the availability of water and the fitness and the interests of the group. Exceptional rains can make some roads impassable. Exceptionally dry conditions can make some walks almost impossible. Flood waters can deposit or remove sand, completely changing the nature of some camp sites. It is never possible for us to be 100% sure what we will find in a particular place until we get there.

Water supplies are limited. We may find as little as one waterhole per day. In drought conditions, that water may be muddy or green with algae. Boiling makes it drinkable. If you are not prepared to drink this kind of water, this is not the trip for you.

As a safety measure, it will be necessary to carry 2–3 litres per person on most days. We will, however, plan to camp near water every night unless we decide to camp on a high point to enjoy the sunrise and sunset views.

Refillable wine bladders are a good way to carry extra water. They should be used as an addition to rather than as a replacement for your normal water bottles.

Centralian spinifex is particularly sharp and can penetrate most lightweight shoes. Strong boots and heavy gaiters are recommended.

As both sections of the trip may include one or more day-walks, you should bring a day pack or be prepared to use a full size pack on day-walks.

Those doing more than one section of the trip will have to carry only what they need for each section. Additional food and clothing can be left in Alice Springs during the first walk.

Central Australian weather is highly variable. Although rain is unlikely, it is possible. One of our groups even had a bit of snow. Normal daytime temperatures reach the mid to upper 20's, but extremes can go to the low 30's or not get out of the low teens. Nighttime temperatures can drop well below freezing. You must be prepared for anything.

If you want to do some shopping before the trip, Coles and Woolies are both open late.

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 drive.

Special Offer. This is such a good year to visit that we have left the list price at the 2020 level. It will go up by at least \$400 next year. In addition, we are offering a **\$500 discount** to anyone who books the full trip.