



Larapinta Trail
...expand your horizons

Information for School Groups



January 2008



Northern Territory Government
Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts



INTRODUCTION TO THE TRAIL

Situated in the heart of Central Australia, the Larapinta Trail extends over 223 kilometres along the backbone of the West MacDonnell Ranges.

The Trail is divided into 12 sections, each a 1-2 day walk. The Trail encompasses some of the key attractions of the Ranges including Simpsons Gap, Ellery Creek Big Hole, Ormiston Gorge and Glen Helen. The Trail also links in with other walking tracks within the West MacDonnell National Park, allowing side trips to explore more of what the Park has to offer.

The Larapinta Trail begins at the old Alice Springs Telegraph Station and finishes at Mt Sonder, the highest point and end of the Trail. The distance of each section ranges between 9 and 31 kilometres and each section is graded medium, hard or very hard.

Facilities on the Trail are varied, however most campsites offer picnic tables and hardened tent sites. All Trailheads have a water supply and some have free gas barbecues.

To walk any section of the Trail a reasonable level of fitness is required with the ability to walk long distances and carry a pack between 15-20kg.

Why is it important to follow these guidelines?

Every year more and more people are walking the Larapinta Trail and the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory are required to manage the impacts of visitors. This job is made a lot easier if walkers follow some basic rules, which will enhance their own experience, the experience of other Trail users and assist the long term future of the Trail. Some points within this document are crucial to the health and safety of all walkers on the Trail and must be adhered to by everyone. Others are governed by law.

Where you can find out more detailed information about the Trail?

To find out more about the Trail, particularly current conditions you should visit our website www.nt.gov.au/parks and follow the link to Walks, Talks & Trails.

To get copies of detailed maps, trail notes, a poster of the entire trail and fact sheets about safety, logistics and looking after the Trail then get yourself a copy of the 'Larapinta Trail Package' available from Parks and Wildlife or from Central Australian Tourism. The Package costs \$44 + postage.

We also have an email address to answer your queries: larapintatrail.nreta@nt.gov.au

Alternatively give us a call on (08) 8951 8250 between 8am and 4.20pm.

PLEASE NOTE...

The information in this document relates specifically to school groups and does not cover general information, logistics or safety information. It is important that you use one or all of the sources listed above to make more informed decisions about your walk on the Larapinta Trail.

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL GROUPS

Supervision

School groups are required to be supervised at all times whilst on the Trail. Thorough planning and preparation is essential for all walkers and it is the responsibility of teachers and supervisors of the group to inform students about the points listed in this document.

It is recommended that all teachers and supervisors have a current Senior First Aid certificate or equivalent. At least one person with a Remote Area First Aid certificate is highly desirable. Groups are strongly encouraged to carry a portable satellite phone and spare battery for emergencies.

There should be 1 teacher or supervisor for every 8 students in the group. Teachers and supervisors should distribute themselves evenly amongst the group for the most effective supervision. On high use sections of the Trail (sections 1 - 3 and 10 - 12) it is possible to walk with a ratio of 1 teacher/supervisor per 15 students. These ratios are the same for guided tours.

Fees

No entry fee applies to the West MacDonnell National Park, however Standley Chasm is privately owned and operated and an entry fee does apply. Standley Chasm is open from 8am to 5pm daily (contact (08) 8956 7440 for more details).

Some campgrounds within the West MacDonnell National Park attract camping fees: Ellery Creek Big Hole (\$3.30 per person), Ormiston Gorge (\$6.60 per person) and Redbank Gorge (\$3.30 per person). It is a good idea to carry the correct amount of money as change is not available. There is also a charge if you are planning to camp at Standley Chasm.

Other campsites along the Larapinta Trail are free and most are designated for Larapinta Trail walkers only.

Groups over 8

Groups of 8 people or more are required to contact Parks and Wildlife with details of their walk plan and the size of their group. These details will be posted under 'Current Conditions' on our website for the benefit of other walkers.

Walk plan & emergency contact

Safety should be your first priority when walking the Larapinta Trail. Careful planning, each member of the group being equipped with the right supplies and knowing your groups limits are the keys to a trouble free walk.

Be sure to have a detailed walk plan which lists your proposed route, direction of travel, campsites, group details, emergency plan and emergency contact details. This should be left with a reliable person who will contact the police if you fail to notify them at the end of your walk. Don't forget to include your satellite phone number in case contact needs to be made.

Ensure that one member of your party (a teacher or supervisor) fills in the logbook at each Trailhead. This will help us to track your movements in the case of an emergency.

Campsites

In some places it is possible for school groups to have their own campsite as an alternative to sharing with independent walkers. This is made easier if the group has their own transport.

Here are some recommended campsites including a brief description:

- *Simpsons Gap – Sections 1 & 2* (there is a designated school camp located 4km from the Gap. It has picnic shelters, firepits, showers, toilets and gas barbecues. School groups have free use of the camp and other users pay \$3.30 per person. Bookings are required. Phone the Simpsons Gap Ranger Station on (08) 8955 0310).
- *Old Hamilton Downs Homestead – Sections 2 & 3* (this privately owned facility is an alternative to camping at Jay Creek. Accommodation, kitchen, camping and toilet/shower facilities are available. Fees apply. Located 4.5km from the Jay Creek Trailhead. Contact (08) 8956 8613).
- *Standley Chasm – Sections 3 & 4* (privately owned and operated, entry and camping fees apply. Contact (08) 8956 7440 for more details).
- *Birthday Waterhole & Hugh Gorge – Sections 4, 5 & 6* (it is preferred that groups camp at Birthday Waterhole. If your group does camp at Hugh Gorge then pick an area in the creek before Hugh Gorge).
- *Ellery Creek Big Hole – Sections 6 & 7* (use of the main campsite. Fees apply).
- *Serpentine Chalet Bush Camp – Sections 8 & 9* (1.3km from Serpentine Chalet Dam Trailhead to the first of eight campsites).
- *Ormiston Gorge – Sections 9 & 10* (there is a designated coach camping area with gas barbecues and access to a shower and toilet block. Fees apply).
- *Glen Helen Resort – Sections 10 & 11* (this privately owned facility is an alternative to camping at Finke River. A grassed camping area and other accommodation is available, fees apply. Contact (08) 8956 7489 for more details).
- *Finke Two Mile – Sections 10 & 11* (this picturesque bush camping area is an alternative to the Finke River Trailhead).
- *Redbank Gorge – Sections 11 & 12* (there is a designated coach camping area at the Woodland campground 2km from the Trailhead. It has toilets, firepits, picnic tables and gas barbecues. Fees apply).

All other locations require independent walkers and groups to camp at the same designated Larapinta Trail campsite.

There are two shelters on the Trail at Jay Creek and Finke River. Independent walkers and groups are both welcome to use these shelters however it is important to respect the privacy and space of other users, as well as keeping noise to a minimum. The shelters are only for walkers without vehicle support. All groups with vehicle support should camp at Glen Helen Resort or Finke Two Mile (see above).

The shelters operate on a first come, first served basis and no bookings are taken for these facilities. There is room for tents to be pitched around the shelters. Cooking and toilet facilities are to be shared amongst all Trail users.

Water

All vehicle supported groups are required to supply their own water, rather than use the Ranger maintained water tanks at Trailheads. This will help to ensure that the tanks don't run dry for independent walkers in between scheduled refills.

Please report any faulty tap, empty tank or any other issue of immediate concern to Rangers upon arrival at the nearest Ranger Station.

If your group is not going to have vehicle support and arranging your own water supplies is not practical, please contact the Parks and Wildlife Commission prior to commencing your walk so that we can make alternative arrangements.

Fires

The Larapinta Trail has a 'fuel stove only' policy and no fires are permitted on the Trail. A high fire danger exists within Central Australia and fire bans may be in force. Bushfires are quick to start but the landscape is slow to recover.

This presents a very valuable learning opportunity for students, helping them to understand the importance of dead wood as habitat and to appreciate the impacts that would occur if every walker was to light a campfire.

It is possible to have a small campfire at Birthday Waterhole and Hugh Gorge if you are not at the designated Larapinta Trailhead. Small campfires are permitted at Finke Two Mile. You can also have them in the designated firepits at Ellery Creek Big Hole, the Serpentine Chalet Bush Camp or at the Redbank Gorge Woodland campsite. In all of these circumstances it is essential that you bring your own firewood as firewood collection is not permitted within the National Park. Be sure to fully extinguish your campfire before departing the campsite.

Rubbish

All rubbish, including food scraps and tissues, must be carried out and placed in bins. However, people walking the whole Trail may dispose of their rubbish at Simpsons Gap and Ormiston Gorge. Do not bury or burn your rubbish, as it will only be dug up and scattered by animals.

It is essential that no rubbish is disposed of in toilets where they are supplied. This would result in costly repairs and the failure of the toilets to work in the manner they are designed to.

When planning your walk, consider the amount of packaging you use. Minimising packaging will reduce the amount of rubbish you have to carry and will inevitably lighten everybody's pack. Please assist by taking out any garbage you see on the Trail.

Toileting

Make your toilet stops at least 100 metres away from any watercourse and the Trail itself. Burying human waste and toilet paper under a layer of soil keeps the flies off while allowing it to dry out quickly. Carry a small trowel for digging a hole approximately 15cm deep. Good hygiene will reduce the likelihood of you and others falling ill along the Trail.

Food drops

Most school groups have a support vehicle which eliminates the need for food drops. However if you do need to make food drops ensure that they are well concealed and secured in animal and ant proof containers.

It is possible to make food drops at Ellery Creek, Serpentine Gorge and Ormiston Gorge. Keys to access these food drop locations require a deposit and keys are available at the Tourism Central Australia Visitor Centre. Several tour companies also provide food drop services. See our website for more details. These companies will supply the necessary key to access the various food drop

locations. You can also make food drop arrangements with Standley Chasm and Glen Helen Resort.

Support Vehicles

We highly encourage you to only employ one support vehicle and driver per group to alleviate over crowding at Trailheads. In some cases the support vehicle can only pick up and drop off walkers at Trailheads, in others the driver must drop off walkers, park the vehicle and then walk to the campsite and camp with their group. Please contact Parks and Wildlife for more details.

Keep to the Track

For your own safety and the preservation of the Trail, please keep to the Track at all times.

Noise

The Trail winds through often isolated and peaceful areas... for many walkers this is the main attraction for walking the trail and it is important to be mindful of how much noise you are making. This is most important at campsites where exhausted walkers are getting some much earned rest! Keep noise at campsites to a minimum, particularly when it gets dark. Respect the experience of other walkers.

Protecting natural and cultural assets

The MacDonnell Ranges are of great spiritual significance to Western Arrernte Aboriginal people. The Aboriginal custodians for this country and the Parks and Wildlife Commission NT strongly request that you respect this place and don't damage the natural environment or take anything away from the Trail. All plants, animals, rocks and artefacts in NT Parks and Reserves are protected by law.

Keep our wildlife wild

Please do not encourage animals into your campsite with food and most importantly do not leave food scraps around when you depart. This will encourage wild animals to visit campsites and become a nuisance to walkers. Crows and Dingoes in particular will help themselves to your food and belongings (including hiking boots!) if they are left unsecured.

Wildlife that is encouraged to rely on handouts will often have to be destroyed because they can become dangerous to walkers.

Mobile Phone reception

It is suggested that you carry some form of emergency communication such as a satellite phone or EPIRB (Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon). There are very limited areas that mobile phones ('Next G' only) work on the Trail, mainly the very highest points.

These can be bought or hired. Details are available on our website under 'Links and Contacts'.

Waterholes and swimming

Confined aquatic systems are easily damaged. Don't introduce contaminants such as food scraps, soap, insect repellent and sunscreen to creeks and waterholes. Use sand instead of detergent to clean dishes and do all washing well away from the water's edge. Remember that people and animals may need to drink there.

Ellery Creek Big Hole and Ormiston Gorge are the best places for swimming. During the walking season (April to October) and even during the summer all waterholes in the West MacDonnell National Park can be freezing cold. You should never dive straight into the water and it is recommended that swimmers carry some sort of flotation device.

In an emergency

Teachers and supervisors should aim to spread themselves out amongst the group, ideally with a teacher at the front, middle and back of the group. If the group is spread out then encourage students to walk in groups of 3 so that in an emergency some one can stay with the injured person while another person goes to get help. It is also strongly recommended that each student carries an emergency whistle and signalling mirror.

If a member of your group gets lost...

Notify the police as soon as possible. They will want to know:

- The exact location of the last sighting of the person.
- What clothing they were wearing.
- Medical conditions or other relevant personal information.

Leave a prominent marker (e.g. a brightly coloured shirt) at the location of the last sighting on the Trail to assist searchers.

If you get lost...

Stay calm and if you are in a group, remain together. Do not make things worse by leaving the group or attempting to get back to safety. Seek a nearby open area to wait for assistance.

If there is a bushfire...

Don't commence your walk if a bushfire is burning in the area. Check with a Ranger first or check the Trailhead for the latest information and advice.

If you are caught in an area threatened by fire:

- Find an open, bare area (e.g. a creekbed).
- Protect yourself from radiant heat (e.g. crouch behind a rocky outcrop and wait for the fire to pass).
- Replace any synthetic clothes you are wearing with wool or cotton clothing. Avoid having any skin exposed.
- Protect your airway. Keep low to the ground and cover your mouth with a wet cloth.

Information about prescribed burns by Parks and Wildlife Rangers will be posted on the relevant Trailhead information boards. If in doubt, do not start your walk until it is definitely safe to do so.

In the case of a flood...

Parts of the Trail follow normally dry watercourses which may be subject to flooding. If flash floods occur walkers are advised to move to high ground and wait for creeks to subside. Do not camp in creek beds if there has been constant rain in the region. In the case of sustained flows walkers should wait to be rescued. Never attempt to cross flood waters.

As mentioned previously all teachers and supervisors should be trained in first aid and carry a well stocked first aid kit.

Remember... safety should be your first priority when walking the Larapinta Trail.

RECOMMENDED WALKING & PRE-VISIT INFORMATION

When organising your trip all group leaders are encouraged to contact the Parks and Wildlife Commission to discuss suitable itineraries that match the level of experience, fitness, age group and time available for your group.

Our website contains some suggested itineraries for independent walkers and you may find this useful in your initial planning stages.

Useful References

Bushfires and Bushtucker. Aboriginal Plant Use in Central Australia (1995) Peter Latz. IAD Press.

A Field Guide to Central Australia (1995) Penny van Oosterzee. Reed Books Australia.

Field Guide to the Birds of Australia (1996) Ken Simpson and Nicolas Day. 5th ed. Penguin Books Australia Ltd.

Take a walk in Northern Territory's National Parks (2006) John and Lyn Daly. Take A Walk Publications.

Tracks, Scats and Other Traces (2003) Barbara Triggs. Oxford University Press.

Wildflowers and Plants of Inland Australia (2001) Anne Urban. Published by Paul Fitzsimmons.

The Alice Springs Desert Park

A visit to the *Alice Springs Desert Park* before your walk would be well worth while. The Desert Park gives visitors a better understanding of the plants, animals and people of the desert and showcases 3 different desert habitats. Special rates are available for school groups. Phone (08) 8951 8788 to find out more.

*We hope you have a great walk in Central Australia on the Larapinta Trail.
Please do not hesitate to call us if you have any questions about planning your walk.*