

West Macdonnell Ranges: June 7-20, 2026

List price - \$5395 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 section two.

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

List price: \$3295

- Day 0** Pre-trip meeting at 6.30 p.m, venue TBA. 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 Ormiston Plus

List price: \$3495

- 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: June 7-13

As we no longer have permission to do anything other than Birthday Waterhole which is off the Larapinta Trail for this section, we will stick to the trail between Standley Chasm and Ellery Big Hole, except for a short detour to Birthday Waterhole.



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

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.



Enjoying an off-trail view near Birthday

Section 2: Ormiston Plus: June 13-20

As we are no longer permitted to deviate from the Larapinta Trail we will give it a complete miss and concentrate on the area near Ormiston Pound where we find more water and more spectacular views than are available on the trail itself.

We begin with a drive from Ellery Big Hole to Ormiston Gorge where there is an opportunity to

purchase a coffee or cool drink before setting off on the marked trail into Ormiston Pound. Once in the pound, we leave the marked trail and trek east toward Mt Giles where we camp near a small spring close to its base ranges.

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.



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

If we do Mt Giles as a day walk, we may choose to do a long day walk to 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.



Approaching the summit of Mount Giles.

Back at the base of Mt Giles, 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.



Sunrise, Bowmans Gap.

For those who can stand the cold, there is always more than enough water for a swim.

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 we came in on. 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 the easier options on section two. The most strenuous option is the Giles Ridge walk.

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. The pack carrying portion of this section will include several moderately steep climbs and some rock hopping along creek beds. As we will be on a marked trail, heavy gaiters and long trousers are optional.

Section 2. The pack carrying portion of this section normally includes only moderate climbs without much thick spinifex. The optional pack carry to the top of Giles followed by a ridge walk to Bowmans is the hardest option.

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.

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.



Hilltop view near Bowmans Gap.



Walking through spinifex going toward Mt Giles

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. The official campsite at the top of Brinkley Bluff tends to be quite windy. Be prepared if we choose to stop there.

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. Campfires are permitted here, but not on the Larapinta Trail



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.

Campfires are not permitted on the Larapinta Trail so we will use stoves for all of section one unless we detour off the trail to Birthday Waterhole.

Exceptional rain in February 2026 will make this an exceptionally good year to visit.