



Considered to be among the best hiking trails in the world, the Larapinta Trail is as enormously challenging as it is unimaginably beautiful. Having worked in Central Australia for two years, I'd felt that I'd come to appreciate the cultural significance, design of the landscape and the brutality of the elements – but the Larapinta Trail was something else. Hiking the 12 section, 271 kilometres of the Larapinta Trail over 14 days had long been a dream, but I'd also never believed in its reality. I'm a 27-year-old fella from Adelaide who craves the adrenalin of adventure but wishes the physical challenge didn't have to accompany it.

Until hiking the Larapinta, I'd never trekked longer than 8 days consecutively. The longest solo trip I'd undertaken was only 3 days. But here I am, now back in Adelaide after an unreal adventure and I'd recommend it to anyone.



The view of Mount Sonder at sunrise. Photo: Ben Trewren

Choosing your itinerary

I chose to hike the trail East to West (Alice Springs to Mount Sonder) for a culmination of reasons:

- This is the direction in which the trail was designed to be hiked.
- You hike what's considered the least interesting scenery first, but you don't really know it as you don't have anything to compare it with.
- While the sections are longer at the beginning in terms of kilometres, I appreciated the relative flatness of starting with section 1 and 2. This allowed me some time for my body to adjust to the hot and dry climate, to my pack and to get on top of my hydration.
- I was keen to finish on a high by climbing Mount Sonder as my last adventure on the trail. Better still, I wanted to enjoy the view of Mount Sonder as I approached.
- The sun would be on my back instead of my face in the morning (I planned to start early and aimed to finish hiking early afternoon).
- I wanted to make the most of the kiosk and showers at Ormiston Gorge between sections 9 and 10.
- I had a clear timeframe, so I could confidently organise a pickup time from Redbank Gorge.



Getting started early on the long days to avoid the afternoon sun. Photo: Ben Trewren

When to Go

I was on the trail for the last week of August and the first week of September. The weather was incredibly kind to me with a daily average of 26°C and only two days above 30°C. This was such a relief as I was tormented with temperatures in the mid 30°C the week before, and similar forecasts the week after I completed the trail. Overnight was also quite mild. I never needed more than a fleece jumper and found sleeping pretty easy.



It was also a very quiet time. In total, I saw around 50 people on the trail and camped with no more than 5 people at a time. Much different to the stories from the peak period through June and July. Overall, the weather will be the biggest consideration for you when deciding to hit the trail. I was really happy with my time of year – not too hot during the day and no frostbite to my key body parts overnight.



I had clear bright blue skies every day whilst on the trail. Photo: Ben Trewren

Duration of the trail

Having allocated myself 14 days on the trail, my navigation plan was constantly changing in the lead-up. However, I was really happy with my final decision. Hiking for 13 days and taking the opportunity for a rest day on Day 11 at Ormiston Gorge.

In a nutshell, I took a day to hike each of sections 1-8. I then split 9 in half over two days, before taking a rest day. Then 10 and half of 11 in a day, the second half of 11 the following day and then 12 on the final day. While on my day off, I tackled the Ormiston Pound Walk.



Logbooks were provided by NT Parks and Wildlife at every trailhead. Photo: Ben Trewren.

Flights & Accommodation

I booked my flights to Alice Springs with Qantas using my Frequent Flyer points. It's a 2-hour flight and there's one flight a day from Adelaide to Alice Springs that usually arrives around 1 pm. And there's another from Alice Springs to Adelaide which usually departs around 2 pm. I think it's a very similar arrangement from other major cities.

I was fortunate to have friends who live in Alice Springs who generously picked me up and dropped me off at the airport, and gave me a place to stay. However, if you're not as lucky as me, you can catch a shuttle for around \$15 (cash) into Alice Springs Town Centre. Or a Taxi is anywhere between \$30-\$50 depending on your location.

Alice Springs has a range of accommodation like hostels, motels, and hotels which are all relatively affordable for what's offered. When looking for accommodation, research pricing and then try and pick one a location close to the other services you'll need (supermarkets, outdoor store, Visitor Information Centre, etc.).



Arriving in Alice Springs. Photo: Ben Trewren

How long does it take to complete?

One of the most adventurous things about the Larapinta Trail is that you can flexibly and safely choose your own adventure. I met some people aiming to complete the trail in 9 days, whereas I met others on their 20th day. It really does come down to how you want to tackle the challenge. I decided based on how much walking I thought I could complete each day (around 18-20kms), access to water and that I only had 2 weeks leave available.

Upon completing the Larapinta Trail, my longest day was 31.3kms through Section 6. My shortest day was 13.5kms through Section 7.



Try to avoid focusing on the km's marked on the trail signs as they're frequently incorrect (due to trail maintenance, changes, etc.). For the lightweight hikers – you can save a bit of weight by allocating maps to your food drop boxes.



Often, trailheads provided as much information as the maps did... Photo: Ben Trewren

Navigation

While I don't recommend them because they lack map detail and the information (especially trail data) is frequently incorrect, as they're currently the only option, it's worthwhile getting your hands on the [NT Parks and Wildlife](#) map set available [here](#). I got word on the trail that [Larapinta Trail Trek Support \(LTTS\)](#) are looking to create their own maps with far greater map detail. They also want to include more interactive information on the flora, fauna, history, cultural heritage, etc., which will be a fantastic improvement.

In saying all this, the trail is incredibly well marked with the familiar blue arrows on the white signs. Because of the abundance of signage, you often wonder whether there is a need for maps or a GPS.



Just follow the blue arrows... Photo: Ben Trewren

Food Drops & Trail Support

I paid LTTS for the [End to End Solo Package](#) and couldn't be happier with my decision. Included in the package are 3 food drops at Standley Chasm, Ellery Creek and Ormiston Gorge along with box collection after I'd passed through (allowing me to unload gear if need be).

The package also included transfer back to Alice Springs from Redbank Gorge at the end of my walk, stove fuel provisions (as it can't be transported on a plane), organisation of the food box room keys, [PLB](#) and [SPOT](#) hire and support and advice towards my navigation plans.

I highly recommend Zac and his team from [LTTS](#) to support you when undertaking the Larapinta Trail – they offer a huge amount of support for a range of requests.



My food boxes all packed and ready to give to LTTS before the start of my trek. Photo: Ben Trewren

Other gear to leave in your food boxes

Aside from food, your food boxes are a fantastic place for a change of clothes, batteries, toiletries and extra rewards like bottles of Gatorade.

They're also fantastic for dumping gear you no longer needed on the trail (like my down jacket), no longer wanted (books that I didn't have the energy to read) or became unusable (certain pairs of underwear).

Put an obvious rubbish bag in your Ellery Creek box. Unlike Standley Chasm and Ormiston Gorge, there are no bins and LTTS will need to take your rubbish for you. Double layer it if necessary to prevent the smell penetrating everything else in your box.



While LTTS help organise the pickup and return of your food box room key, you need to book it yourself. It's easy enough by just calling Alice Springs Tourism Centre and paying your \$50 deposit plus \$10 fee over the phone. However, be mindful that the keys can book out (especially in peak periods) and then you need to rely on others. So for peace of mind, get in early on this one.



Picking up my food box at Ormiston Gorge. Photo: Ben Trewren

Food I took for the trek

I kept my menu varied and easy as I didn't want to be consumed with 'cooking' along with my hike.

Here are some of the options I carried:

- Breakfast – Muesli with Powdered Milk & Fruit Puree
- Snacks – Lollies, Dried Fruit, Shapes, M&Ms, Dehydrated Fruit Straps
- Lunch – Crackers, Tuna, Metwurst, Peanut Butter, Cheese
- Dinner – Soup Powder, Dehydrated Meals

Looking back I would probably pack more salty snack options to assist with rehydration. For me, this would've looked like more soup powder, salty nuts and any other savoury snacks.

Some tips for the dehydrated meals:

- Add a bit of extra water to assist with an alternative way of rehydrating.
- Wait 20 minutes rather than 10 minutes for the food to rehydrate for better flavour and texture.
- Eat straight from the bag (there's a slit halfway down the pack to rip across and make it easy to eat from) so there's no washing up.
- I personally found the Back Country 1 serve sizes fine for my appetite, but recognise that I'm not a big eater.



Cottage Pie they reckon! One of my favourite rehydrated meals on the trip Photo: Ben Trewren

What kind of food is available at the Kiosk?

The usual cold drinks, ice-creams and chocolate bars are available at both kiosks. But it's the range of homemade and fresh options that I really craved – especially when spending 14 days on a hiking trail.

At Standley Chasm, I had the Lasagna (\$18) which came with three generous serves of salad. They're also open for dinner Thursday to Saturday. I came through on a Saturday so I made the most of the fresh food and had a Steak with a massive bowl of steamed veggies for dinner.

Upon arriving at Ormiston Gorge, I tucked into their Big Breakfast (\$16), while also enjoying their Salad (\$10) and Steak Sandwich (\$10) over the course of my stay. They also do a ripper



of an Iced Coffee and the cakes are worth every cent. They were also very generous to package up a Lamb and Rice (\$10) for me to reheat at dinner time.



Breakfast at Ormiston Gorge Kiosk. So good. Photo: Ben Trewren

Boots & Gaiters

The important thing to know about the Larapinta Trail is that there are rocks, rocks, rocks and more rocks. This is why you need boots that offer support. The second important thing to know is that the trail conditions exceeded my expectations. Not once did I feel like the trail wasn't 'clear' to hike through so it wasn't necessary to have epic amounts of 'protection'.

I hiked in a pair of pretty solid Scarpa Kailash GTX boots. Upon reflection, I would've opted for a lighter and more breathable pair of boots that still offered support. Most importantly, make sure your soles are in good nick and are durable enough to handle the rocky terrain. It's not uncommon to hear of people's boots disintegrating mid-trail because they lacked quality or they had been overused prior to starting. I saw one lady wearing Dunlop Volleys?!

I'm also very grateful for the advice I received beforehand to hike in shorts with ankle gaiters because that's all I needed. I also really appreciated the ventilation from this combination. I did see a few people with trousers that zip off into shorts, which are also a great clothing option. Because the trail is in such good condition, I only experienced an occasional brush with spinifex. You always felt like you could clearly see what was on the trail. In saying all this, I didn't even see a single snake!



Giving the feet a break and celebrating the Bombers making the AFL finals! Photo: Ben Trewren

Clothing to wear on the trail

Clothing is something I ummed and ahed about a lot as I felt there was a fine line between getting it right and wrong. Knowing that I have a pretty warm body, but also cautious of how bitterly cold Central Australian nights can be during the winter months, it was tough to call. I hiked in shorts and a t-shirt that were lightweight, breathable, and also super durable. On my feet, I wore my trusted Wigwam Merino Socks to look after my feet (which they did 95% of the time).

I carried a fleece sweater (which was all I needed when temperatures dropped) and a spare t-shirt to change into. At the start I had a pair of long compression tights and a down jacket, however, once I realised that overnight temperatures weren't that cold for me, I left my jacket in a food box.

I found the compression tights fantastic to wear upon arriving at camp. Especially as they gave me the peace of mind that they would hold my legs together when I seriously doubted they would on their own.

At my halfway food box at Ellery Creek, I included a second change of clothes. I also threw fresh undies and socks into every food box (thanks, Forrest Gump) and included a fresh t-shirt for my day off at Ormiston Gorge.



On top of Brinkley Bluff. Photo: Ben Trewren



Doing laundry

I carried all my clothes in a Scrubba Wash Dry Bag because it has a range of advantages. It easily holds everything I wear, keeps out dust and moisture and has a valve for expelling air for packing. Most beneficial, however, is that when I needed to wash my clothes it did a fantastic job of breaking down the gunk without wasting too much precious water. Don't forget to also take along a clothesline to dry your clothes on after giving them a good scrub.



Washing day on the trail. Photo: Ben Trewren

Sleeping gear for Larapinta

When it came to sleeping, I trusted my Sea to Summit Basecamp II Bag and Thermolite Reactor Extreme Liner to get the job done, so I slept in very little, sometimes nothing which gave the skin a chance to just take it easy and breathe. Very happy with this plan of attack.

Shelter

In order to save weight and knowing I had spent over 300 nights in a swag before, I decided on a bivvy bag as my shelter. I knew that many of the trailheads already had platforms established, with shelter options available, and that packing my bivvy only required 'stuffing' – so I was pretty confident with my choice.



The usual setup at camp. Photo: Ben Trewren

Should you bring a tent?

Overall, I was happy and unphased with this decision until getting to Ormiston Gorge where I had thrown my 1-man Zempire Atom tent into my food box so that I had some 'sense of security' for leaving my gear unattended during my day off as well as when I would head to summit Mount Sonder a few days later from Redbank Gorge.

Upon picking my tent up and using it, I realised the peace of mind it gave me compared to my bivvy. At night, I could go to bed and zip up the inner and automatically my fears of what 'may' happen decreased. I felt much more comfortable to put a podcast in my ears because I didn't feel the need to hear what was happening around me. I also didn't stress about pesky mice getting into my gear as much.

In hindsight, I'm still undecided whether I would opt to carry the extra weight and spend the extra time pitching and packing up the tent for the entire journey. But I certainly appreciated ending the trip with the comfort of the tent.



Enjoying the view of Mount Sonder from the tent. Photo: Ben Trewren



Additional gear Packing Tips

Toiletries

- Lip Balm and Moisturiser are worth throwing into your toiletries because the dry air will wreak havoc on your skin.
- Tea Tree Oil helps manage the funky smells and germs coming from your feet.
- Hand Sanitiser is definitely worth it because water is scarce, plus you need to stay on top of your hygiene.
- Wilderness Wash and Wipes are a must because they're bio-degradable and soft on the environment and they give you an opportunity to wash – either yourself, your dishes or clothes.

Tools and accessories

- Overcome the fear of the stigma, and grab yourself a set of hiking poles. They'll improve your balance, take the strain off your legs, provide support and at the worst, protect you against a raging animal.
- Small tweezers/Splinter Probes are fantastic for dealing with endless prickles and if needed, draining blisters.
- Carry a lightweight Solar Panel because if you get anything like the weather I did, you'll get plenty of clear skies and pumping sun each day which is perfect to keep cameras and GPS units charged.



Making the most of the sun and charging the batteries. Photo: Ben Trewren

Hydration Gear

- Hydration Tablets are a must to stay on top of your fluid intake. They also keep your electrolyte and salt levels up and are ideal for breaking up the taste of water.
- I personally love the Nuun Active tablets as they're low in sugar and carbohydrates and are available in a range of fruity flavours.

Comfort gear

- Throw in a packable daypack for when you reach Redbank Gorge. You won't need to carry a full pack up Mount Sonder, just the essentials.
- Have some foam to sit on. The comfort is really appreciated by your bum and it offers fantastic protection against the prickles. I personally loved the Thermarest Z-Seat.



Sitting at the top of Serpentine Gorge at the end of section 7. Photo: Ben Trewren

Where to go from here?

In the second part of my Larapinta series, I talk about what to expect on the trail – water sources, facilities, camps, phone reception, hazards and leaving no trace on the track.

Are you prepping for a big hike like Larapinta? What do you think is the most challenging part?