



It was a hot day and the trail kept going up, and up. Our packs were full with all our gear, 6 days of food, as well as 3 litres of water each. We were on the first day of the Larapinta Trail climbing up to Euro Ridge, and it was hot.

We had to stop numerous times and get the packs off and rest. Fortunately, there was a breeze that helped cool us down when we stopped, but it did little to rid us of the flies. I have travelled many times to Central Australia and never have I seen flies as bad as this.

They swarmed over us, trying to get into our ears, eyes, mouth and nose. Even with fly nets over our heads, there were still a few that managed to get in and drive us crazy.

Each time we moved they would take off in a cloud and buzz around before settling again on any part of us they could find. It was a hard start to the walk, and we had eighteen days and two hundred and thirty kilometres to go.



*Sunrise on the Larapinta Trail.*

## Reaching the top of Euro Ridge

We finally reached the top of Euro Ridge and had fantastic views to the south as well as being able to look back to Alice Springs. Eventually, we started to descend off the ridge, which meant we didn't have far to go until we arrived at Wallaby Gap, our first camp.

We each only had about a cup of water each left at this stage and was looking forward to having a big drink. At last, we saw the shelter and were able to finally get the packs off and stop.



*Making it to the top of Euro Ridge.*

## The first night on the trail

To say we were shattered was, to say the least. The flies had gone for the day so it was tent up, a quick wash behind a suitable tree and then dinner. I had trouble settling as it was a warm night and I was very sweaty and restless. Then both my legs started to cramp.

I had never had cramps like this before. I had been drinking electrolyte drinks throughout the day, to avoid this but it obviously wasn't enough.

Laying in bed after the cramps settled down, sweaty, aching, and exhausted, after only the first day, I really wondered if I was going to make it all the way to the end.



*There are lots and lots of rocks on this trail.*

## The Larapinta Trail

The Larapinta trail is 223 km long and covers some very challenging country. It's not an easy trail, with some serious climbs up to the ridges and the occasional rock scramble. But the views, once at the top are fantastic. However, there are lots and lots and lots of rocks.

Your hiking boots need to be in good condition and worn in properly so that they're comfortable and you don't get blisters. Lighter shoes are worn at the wearer's risk.



*Flies, what flies?*



## Food drops on the trail

It is necessary to arrange three food drops for resupply along the trail at Stanley Chasm, Ellery Creek and Ormiston Gorge. A key is needed to access the storage areas for your food drops, which is obtained from the [Alice Springs Visitors Centre](#) (booking ahead is essential). You can do the food drops yourself or there are tour companies that can arrange things for you. It is also necessary to arrange a pick-up or drop off at the end or start, depending on which way you are walking.

## Arranging the hike ourselves

We decided to arrange everything ourselves, mainly because we were a bit late in getting our A into G. We were, however, able to arrange a pickup at the end that would take us back to Glenn Helen where we would leave our car and caravan. To get to the start we had a hire car which we drove back to Alice Springs, then a taxi to the official start of the trail. This sounds a bit tricky but, in the end, we got it all sorted and saved several hundred dollars in doing so.



*One of our campsites along the trail.*

## The second day - arriving at Simpsons Gap

The second day was much easier than the first and we arrived at Simpsons Gap after lunch. After setting up camp we went down to see the Gap. The water was cold as I walked in up to my thighs to try and help my legs. We managed to spot a couple of yellow-footed rock-wallabies up the side of the Gap and found a mobile hotspot where we got phone reception so we could check in with our family.

What I did find useful was the USB ports at the shelters powered by a solar panel that we used to charge our cameras and phones. A group of year 9 boys from a Sydney school then arrived, and it was rather entertaining to watch them set up their tents and start cooking dinner on their [Trangia stoves](#). They all seemed to be going okay though, and everyone was in bed shortly after dark.

## The next couple of days

The next few days were relatively easy with mostly flat walking. The only steep climb was up to Loretta's Lookout just before Millers Flat. There was, however, a choice here to go up or go around. With memories of our first day still in our minds, we chose to go around.

We also started to see a discrepancy in the distance markers. Going to Mulga Camp from Simpsons Gap was supposed to be 13.7k, but we got a little worried when we saw the 14k marker followed by the 12k marker. We thought we may have missed the camp and we didn't have enough water to make it to the next camp.



*There are some magical views along this hike.*



## Arriving at the campsite

Eventually, at 16km, we arrived at the campsite, there is no shelter here but there are some tables, a toilet, a water tank, as well as the worst flies on the entire trip. They swarmed over everything. It was a relief when the sun started to set because the flies went to bed and we were able to prepare dinner.

## Preparing dehydrated meals for the hike

For this trip, we had gone to the trouble of making our own dehydrated meals instead of buying freeze-dried food. We usually start preparing meals weeks in advance, by cooking extra amounts of food whenever we make meals, such as curries or casseroles. We have a dehydrator, so once dried we then vacuum seal the meals into double serves, and freeze them until they're needed. For more information on how to dehydrate food for hiking, read this article here.



*Walking through Bond Gap.*

## The areas of the trail affected by fires

We were now starting to see a lot of burnt areas that were the result of some big fires earlier in the year. Some of these areas were big, all around the trail, up the sides of the hills and gullies which were totally burnt out. There has been a huge effort from National Park staff and volunteers to get the track open in time for the walking season.

## Beware of trail upgrades that affect the length of the sections

The distance between Mulga Camp and Jay Creek was again different from our guide book. We found out later that some sections of the trail occasionally get upgraded and travel a slightly different route, resulting in longer or sometimes shorter sections. However, usually, there are only minor differences of a couple of kilometres.



*The shelter at Jay Creek.*

## Making friends along the way

You meet some interesting people on walks like this, and usually, you meet up with those people walking in the same direction each night. This is one part of hiking that I really enjoy, each evening you can chat and compare your experiences of the day. It almost becomes like a small walking group of your own.

At Jay Creek, we met a small group coming the other way who were exhausted, with warnings of a difficult day ahead of us the next day. We were planning to walk past Miller's Camp the next day so that we didn't have to stay at a dry campsite, which meant we had to



carry extra water. So, we got up extra early to get a good start.



*Straight up then turn left!*

## Animals on the Larapinta trail

There were notices that cattle may be seen on these sections and although we didn't see any, we did hear them at night sometimes and saw where they'd been during the day. I must say it was disturbing to see the damage they do. The grasses beside the trail were trampled and waterholes were turned into disgusting mud holes with lumps of cow dung in them. I do not know if they are wild or belong to surrounding cattle stations, but we were in a National Park, cattle do not belong here.

We didn't see much animal life at all on the trail which may have been the result of the fires. But apart from the occasional bird, we didn't see anything. Even the Dingoes were scarce, although we did hear them howling on a couple of nights.



*This area showed signs of damage from the fire.*

## Challenges on the trail

All along the Larapinta, there are blue trail markers that point the way to go. They are well placed and easy to see. What did surprise us was when we came across a marker that pointed straight up a rock wall.

We had reached a dry waterfall of about 4 metres high, and the marker literally pointed straight up and partway up there was another pointing at right angles along a rock face. This was a bit of a challenge for me, a 61-year old that was still getting his trail legs and didn't like hanging off rock faces. Fortunately, there were lots of hand and footholds so it was a matter of one step at a time, and we both made it safely up and over.

We could see why the group coming the other way found it difficult. The steep sections we were going down, they would have had to come up. Especially the last part going into Standley Chasm with a couple of very steep short ridges to cross. At last, we arrived at Standley Chasm and could see how close the flames had come to the buildings.



*The trail snakes its way up a burnt-out gorge.*

## Lunch at the kiosk at Stanley Chasm

All around outside the main area was blackened bush. Luckily the camping area was still green, and there were toilets, a laundry and showers. The kiosk sells drinks and hot food and we certainly enjoyed the hamburger and chips we had for a late lunch.

This was the only day we had any rain, right as we were putting up the tent and sorting out our first food drop. So, we put it all in the tent and went for a coffee. We were, however, able to get some washing done while there, and the next day with packs full once again, we set off towards Brinkley Bluff.



*Sunlight over the MacDonnell Ranges.*



## Heading off towards Brinkley Bluff

It was quite a climb with a steep zig-zagging trail that went up and up. Some parts we were going along cliff tops on narrow ridges with fantastic views both sides.

Once at the top, we chose a tent site which is a small area cleared of rocks that is just big enough for a 2-man tent. We erected our tent and had a cuppa, then relaxed until it was time for dinner. There is limited phone reception at the top but we were able to get in touch with family once again.

There were quite a few people up there that night, and we all watched the sunset and moonrise. It was a full moon and it was glorious. Unfortunately, with the moon so bright, we didn't get many stars but that would come later as the moon changed phases later in the walk.



*Setting up camp for the night.*

Being on an exposed ridge, it got a little windy through the night but luckily, we were on the protected side so most of the wind went over us. Still, our tent rattled a fair bit.

We were up early the next day to watch the spectacular colours of the sunrise, and at the other end of the horizon, we saw the moon set behind the distant mountain range. It was a unique experience as the colours of the surrounding mountains changed as the new day began.

The trip down from Brinkley Bluff made me glad we were walking in the direction we were, as it was very steep and windy with quite a few narrow sections that made me a little nervous.



*The Larapinta Trail can get narrow at times.*

## Camping near Birthday Waterhole

The camp that night was the 4/5 junction near Birthday Waterhole where there were quite a few people already set up. Picking a tent site can be a challenge. We wanted the shade as the days were quite warm, but as the sun got low in the sky, we wanted the last rays to keep warm as the nights were getting colder.

From the 4/5 junction, we had to go over Razor Back Ridge, which sounded interesting. The day started relatively easy but as it often did the trail headed up a creek bed and we were soon going over large boulders and between cycads and trees, following our own path as there were no constructed trails in those narrow gorges.

Luckily most of the area had escaped the fires so it was quite nice to experience a different part of the trail.



*Linda making her way up a gorge.*

## Razorback ridge living up to its name

Razorback Ridge lived up to its name, as it consisted of a very narrow ridge top of fractured rock with steep slopes on both sides. Here there were more of those direction arrows that simply pointed down or up steep rock faces which meant a bit of rock scrambling.



After we came off it, we looked back and said to ourselves “we crossed that?!” It was then downhill to a dry camp at Fringe Lily Creek in a lovely shady gorge by a dry creek bed. The nights were getting very cold and often in the mornings we would have ice on the tent that we would shake off then allow to dry in the morning sun.



*Another ‘turn here’ sign on the trail.*

We had a good routine by now with getting up at daybreak usually around 7:00 am – dress, have breakfast, get boots and gaiters on, then fold the tent, pack our backpacks, and leave camp around 8:30 am. When we started walking we would have extra layers on but once we were underway it didn’t take long to warm up once the sun started to come over the ridges.



*Navigating the bright red rocks.*

For the next few days, we walked through a variety of terrain. There were still some burnt-out areas, but luckily there were also some parts that were unaffected. Ghost Gum Flat was one area that was spared and thank goodness it was. It’s a lovely spot with lots of ghost gums scattered throughout the bush. We came across a couple of Major Mitchell cockatoos when we arrived. They didn’t seem too worried by us being there and we were able to get a couple of good photos.



*Luckily, Ghost Gum Flat was unharmed in the fires.*

## Arriving at Ellery Creek

Ellery Creek was our next food drop location and we arrived early in the afternoon. So, after we set up camp, we went down to the swimming hole where there were quite a few people. The water was cold though and anyone that jumped in usually came back out again quickly.



*Ellery Creek is a popular destination to visit along this hike.*

## Adding treats to our resupply box

Something we decided to put in each of our resupply boxes was a bottle of wine. That meant we had a cup each with dinner on the day of our resupply then I would pour the rest into one of our empty water bladders so that we were able to have another cup the next night. It was a nice treat to look forward to each time we resupplied.

Leaving Ellery Creek, I had our only fall of the walk. Going downhill I slipped on some loose stones and ended up in a spinifex bush. I only had a few grazes but the spinifex was another matter. That hurt more than the fall, and I was still pulling out prickles three days later.



*The storage room where the resupply boxes are kept.*

Along this section, we decided to walk past the camp at Waterfall Gorge to have a shorter day going into Ormiston Gorge. This was a long day made harder because we were carrying almost 6 litres of water, as it was another dry camp that night.

We had a long climb up to a saddle at first, then back down and through a gorge, which the trail largely skirted by going up over the side on short steep climbs. Then we started towards the Mt Giles lookout. Firstly, following a zig-zag trail, then some rock scrambles, finally



arriving at the top exhausted.

After another 1.4km along the ridge, we arrived at the campsite at about 4:30 pm – tired and footsore, where we joined several others. We were so tired that after dinner we went straight to bed.



*Yes, this is part of the trail!*

## Arriving at Ormiston Gorge

The track down was nearly as steep as the way up. Thankfully it was a much shorter day so we arrived at Ormiston Gorge just after lunch. Here I bought a pie for lunch and Linda bought a bacon/cheese/egg muffin, and we both had iced chocolate drinks. It certainly beat the crackers with cheese or tuna.



*It was sad to see how huge areas were burnt in the fires.*

## Our last food drop point

This was our last food drop point, so we were able to resupply, get some clothes washed and have showers, which felt so good. We then went back to the Kiosk for date scones and tea. Had a cup of soup for dinner that night then into bed.

We had heard from some other walkers that on the section we had just completed, a number of people were coming down with gastro. While we tried to watch our personal hygiene, I managed to get a touch of it but not as bad as one walker we met at Ormiston Gorge who had spent 3 days in his tent sick. His walking companion said he was not a person to give up, but three days?!

We left the next morning on this the last section. We had 4 days worth of supplies that would take us through to Redbank Gorge and to the end of the Larapinta Trail.



*The bush making a comeback.*

## Camping at Finke River

The camp that night was at Finke River. This river is possibly the oldest river bed in the world. It's broad and sandy, but after heavy rain, it can break it's banks and spread across the surrounding countryside. This is evident when you can see debris in the trees above our heads when standing on the banks.



*Parts of the Finke River still had water.*

## Walking to the Glenn Helen Resort for lunch

We arrived here at lunchtime so after we put the tent up, we left our packs inside and walked the 3.5km to Glenn Helen Lodge where we had another burger and chips for lunch followed by ice cream.





We had left our 4WD and caravan here so we were able to check it was okay and reassure the receptionist that we would actually come back and pick it up. One of the other walkers was staying the night here and although it was tempting to do the same, we decided to go back to camp and have a dehydrated meal for dinner.

This was our coldest night, and we were informed by one of the others it went down to -2.8°C overnight. They camped in the riverbed and we may have been a little warmer, but it was still icy. At least when the condensation on the fly froze, we were able to shake the worst off first, then allow it to dry.



*With Mt Sonder ahead, we were almost there.*

## The second to last day

Our second last day was mostly flattish with a few ups and downs, but the Larapinta still had a last reminder of what this country is about. Another steep climb saw us having lunch on another hilltop lookout. This was a lovely spot for lunch with a downhill section to our second to last camp. We were now away from the burnt areas and the country was looking fantastic. The camp was a welcome sight as I was now struggling with wobbly legs and weakness due to mild gastro.



*We were now passed the burnt areas of the trail.*

We made camp and had a cup of tea, and tried to make stone stools to sit on with limited success. It was a bit challenging as you had to place a lot of little stones between the layers to stop it rocking, so you didn't fall off.



*Trying not to fall off our stone stools.*

## The last day

Our last day was relatively short and we arrived just before lunch. I would have thought there may have been a sign to say you made it or that you were about to start the trail. But nothing.

After we set up camp, Linda went for a walk into Redbank Gorge while I had a nap. I watched a small flock of Zebra Finches getting water from a hollowed rock under the tap on the water tank, then just relaxed.



*We observed a small flock of Zebra finches having a drink.*

We were actually a day ahead of schedule so the plan for the next day was to walk up Mt Sonder to the official trail end. Since I was a bit under the weather I was going to wait at the carpark hoping the tour company that was due to pick us up the next day might be transporting someone else, and give me a ride back to our car early. I would then come back and get Linda and we would head off with an extra day up our sleeve.

It was a long shot, which didn't work, so I went for a short walk into Redbank Gorge and came back in time to meet up with Linda. However, Linda did meet a lady on Mt Sonder that was going back to Glenn Helen and when asked, she said she would give me a lift.







*Cairn at the top of Mt Sonder.*

## The end of the hike

So, that's how we finished. I returned to Redbank Gorge with the car and picked up Linda, we then went back to Glenn Helen, spent the night there and drove out the following day. Driving back to Alice Springs we could see the various ranges that we had spent the last 18 days walking over and reflected on the trip and some of those hidden gorges and wonderful views that were had from the mountains.



*Linda and I on the trail.*

## Would I do the Larapinta Trail again?

Some people walk the Larapinta Trail several times. Would I do it again? Probably not. Did I enjoy it? There were some parts that I really did enjoy, although there were times that I really thought what on earth am I doing here? But it was an experience that won't be forgotten. So, if you like to challenge yourself on a rugged, long-distance trail? Then I would certainly recommend you walk the Larapinta Trail.

**What's the most challenging long-distance hike you've ever done?**