

## Get the best from your bushwalking

Going for a relaxing walk is probably the single most enjoyed recreational activity when you go away on a self-drive holiday. From walks along the beach to a totally self sufficient week in the wilderness, there are captivating walks suitable for everyone.

Wherever you decide to wander, there are some basic hints and tips you should take note of and adhere to.

The environment you are walking in is home to some very fragile flora and fauna. When walking always stick to already established paths and tracks. Cutting across paths may seem like a quick alternative but you are actually eroding and damaging the flora. Keen bushwalkers also try to walk on rocks and hard ground where safely possible to further avoid fragile vegetation.

If crossing private property, use a gate instead of climbing over fences and always leave them the way you found them. If camping out over night try to choose an already established camping site.

When exploring during longer self sufficient trips it is recommended to travel in groups of four to six people. Not only having less immediate impact than a large group of 20 people, it also allows for one or two people to stay behind if someone is injured while the others in the group go for help. **Tip:** Take note of the people you see on paths. Looking out for them may help preserve their safety if something happens to them.

On longer walks always pack a complete first aid kit and include any medication you or your colleagues may need. The kit should include antiseptic, band-aids, pain killers, sterile dressings, elastic bandages scissors and tweezers. St. John's and the Red Cross offer specialised first aid kits for a multitude of uses. Even if you only do short leisurely walks, you should have a first aid kit in your vehicle while travelling.

You may be able to last a few days without food; however lack of water is a totally different ball game. When walking take your own supply of drinking water. This is as easy as taking your own drink bottle. Take at least one litre per person per day and at least two litres per person on hot days and don't forget to drink it, by the time you feel thirsty you're already partially dehydrated.

Foot comfort can be the one thing that makes or breaks an enjoyable walk. Wear sturdy and comfortable footwear. If you have never used bushwalking shoes or boots before, you will be pleasantly surprised by how much better your feet feel during and after your walk. If you are planning to cross uneven or slippery tracks, boots with ankle support are the best option as well as woollen socks.

To protect your legs from scratches and insects wear long trousers and long sleeved shirts to protect you from the sun and wear a hat and sunscreen. It is also a good idea to dress in layers of light clothing if conditions change and take a rain coat just in case!

Before you set off on longer walks in less populated areas, tell at least two reliable people where you are going and how long you expect to be and of course when you get back. A good option is to advise someone at the caravan park or camp ground you are staying at.

Can you read a map and use a compass? The ability to basically read a map is a very important skill required to go on a safe bushwalk. If you can't, bushwalking and orienteering clubs can be a wealth of information and assistance.

Before heading off, check the year the map was produced; this means for both the aerial shots and the ground observations. When walking, keep your map and compass handy and make a quick check every 10-15 minutes.

Maps are usually only made of paper, so protect them from the elements and overuse by covering them in clear plastic and always take a spare copy in case one is damaged or lost. A great idea is to invest in a map holder which protects it from water damage and can even be strung around your neck.

Geographically challenged? Try and look for your own footprints and retrace your steps or follow a track as it will usually lead you back to a site or town. If you run out of water, follow animal tracks as they will usually lead to a water source. Also birds will fly quickly towards water and slower when returning so take note of what's happening above.

Now you need to a backpack to carry everything including your camera. A sturdy backpack will last you for years. The materials which are used to manufacture backpacks usually have a waterproof membrane on the inside. While this lining works very well, if you think there is a chance that it will rain heavily, pack everything into a strong plastic bag first. A panel of thin high density foam provides a great cushion to sit on while have a drink and enjoy the scenery

Remember, the areas where you walk are actually home to native wildlife. Looking after it now will ensure it will be enjoyed for years to come. Always be prepared when travelling through bush and come back with spectacular photos and unique stories instead of sprained ankles and wet clothes.