

# Foreword

Jon Muir

For many years my childhood dreams threw me into the high-altitude world of snow, rock and ice, but even from the earliest days I had an inkling that, in some shape or form, Australia held the potential for an extreme challenge. It wasn't until I stood alone on the summit of Everest and gazed out over the red and brown plains of the Tibetan Plateau that the desert came sharply to mind. Such similar landscapes, Tibet and Australia: both vast expanses of hauntingly isolated arid country.

In 2001 I walked across Australia, from the Spencer Gulf to the Gulf of Carpentaria, with my Jack Russell Seraphine – a journey that holds some of the richest memories of my life. The Australian desert has some of the most ephemeral and stunning landscapes that I've experienced anywhere. Mountains float like blue and purple hallucinations on the horizon, and the pure expanses of the salt lakes glow crystal-white like ice. It is an exquisite perfection of colours: the olive green of the desert oaks standing quietly in the deep-red sand; the twisted, stark, white ghost gums and orange rock against pulsing blue sky; and the soft contrast of the palest hues when the desert is sucked dry of both colour and moisture by the midday sun.

I've found through my prowls out and about into the Australian wilderness that it usually takes me a couple of weeks to experience that deep relaxation that comes as my mind drifts further away from the trappings of the modern world. Reducing my needs to the basics of water, food and shelter, I immerse myself in the incredible beauty of the isolated mountains, coastline or desert. What a privilege that is! To be able to allow myself the time to slow down. I see this 'time out', walking in our magnificent wilderness, as an essential balance to the paper-juggling mind strain that seems to be an inevitable consequence of our hectic world of 'progress' and consumerism. I wonder if anyone can truly escape this pressure without pulling on a pair of boots and taking themselves out for a walk amid the overwhelming magnificence of the land around us.

Walking gives me the opportunity to live totally in the moment, as my mind is absorbed in the sharp focus required to meet the challenges of survival in the wilderness – when I need to get my tarpaulin up quickly to avoid sudden rain or when I am intently studying the landscape for signs of water. At these times the rest of the world ceases to exist. Life becomes simple, uncluttered by the non-essential.

While on the march the steady rhythm of walking allows me the pleasure of letting my mind drift; to dream, plan, reminisce or simply to be. This freedom of mind, this unravelling from the snares and tangles associated with absorption in tasks, or relationships with other people, is deeply supported by walking at length through a natural landscape.

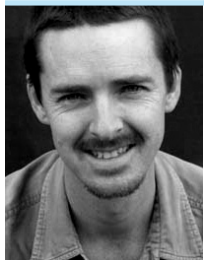
To experience the beating heart of Australia, forget about the Opera House, the Gold Coast or Lygon St, Melbourne – it's when you're out in the forest or the desert, or on an isolated stretch of coast, that the soul of the country becomes apparent. In the spirals on the bark of snow gums, or the meandering spine of mountain ridges, or the lonely cry of the dingo under a desert night sky, here is the essence of Australia.

Jon Muir has devoted his life to outdoor adventure, including five Mt Everest expeditions, a 52-day solo sea-kayaking journey and treks to both Poles, in addition to crossing Australia on foot in 2001. He was awarded the Order of Australia Medal in 1989 and named the Australian Geographic Society's Adventurer of the Year in 2001.

The Walks	Duration	Difficulty	Best Time	Transport	Summary	Page
<b>New South Wales</b>						
Barrington Tops Plateau Explorer	3 days	easy-moderate	all year	private	Swirling mists, subalpine forests, sphagnum swamps and sweeping views	116
Blue Gum Forest	2 days	moderate	Jun-Nov	train, bus	Serene forest, valley-floor seclusion and rugged surroundings	71
Bouddi Coast	5 hours	easy-moderate	Aug-Nov	private	Ocean and distant Sydney views from cliff tops, beach, heathland and forest	55
Bungonia Gorge	2 days	moderate-demanding	all year	private	Limestone gorges and quiet river bends	107
The Chimneys	5-6 hours	easy-moderate	Nov-Apr	shuttle service	Navigate your way up a broad valley to attain a rocky peak providing broad views	92
The Coast Track	2 days	moderate	Aug-Nov	train, ferry	Popular overnight ocean-side walk revealing the best of Australia's oldest national park	58
Gorges, Caves & Plains	5-6 hours	easy	Nov-May	shuttle service	Visit a pretty gorge, limestone cave, waterhole, a peculiar sinkhole and an historic homestead	94
Heart of the Budawangs	4 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Nov	private	Splendid isolation amid spectacular sandstone escarpment country	99
Kanangra Walls to the Kowmung River	2 days	moderate-demanding	Jun-Nov	private	From famous cliffs to an iconic wilderness watercourse	80
Mt Kosciuszko & the Lakes Circuit	3 days	easy-moderate	Dec-Apr	bus, shuttle service	Climb Australia's highest peak, visit a mystical lake and wander among drifts of wildflowers	88
Mt Solitary	2 days	moderate	Jun-Nov	bus	Stunning views, challenging climbs and Jamison Valley solitude	68
Pigeon House Mountain	3 hours	moderate	all year	private	Exhilarating climb to a lonely peak with panoramic views	104
Red Hands Cave	4-4½ hours	easy-moderate	Aug-Nov	train	Relaxing amble to an Aboriginal rock-art site and a secluded creek pool	64
Rosewood Creek Circuit	4 hours	moderate	all year	private	Circuit through World Heritage-listed rainforest and eucalypt forest	120
Six Foot Track	3 days	moderate-demanding	Apr-Oct	bus	Classic journey from Katoomba cliffs to Jenolan Caves	74
Warrumbungles Grand High Tops	3 days	moderate	all year	private	Spectacular volcanic landscapes and steep, challenging trails on the fringe of the outback	112
Wentworth Falls & the Valley of the Waters	5½-7 hours	easy-moderate	Jun-Nov	train, bus	Towering cliffs, plunging waterfalls and cool, moist forest on a Blue Mountains classic	66
<b>Victoria</b>						
Bushrangers Bay	3½-4 hours	easy	year-round	private	A short walk big on features: beach, bush and Cape Schanck lighthouse	133
Cathedral Range	2 days	demanding	Mar-Nov	private	Edge across a narrow ridge in the company of superb lyrebirds	135
Croajingolong Coast Walk	5 days	moderate	Sep-May	shuttle service	Discover why they call it the Wilderness Coast as you stroll the state's wildest, most removed bit of coast	182
Great Ocean Walk Highlight	2 days	moderate	year-round	shuttle service	Walk the country's newest long-distance trail to see the castaway coast the Great Ocean Road misses	143
Mt Bogong	2 days	moderate-demanding	Dec-Apr	private	Conquer Victoria's highest mountain, admire views of distant ranges and cool off beside a waterfall	159
Mt Buffalo Plateau	5-6 hours	easy-moderate	Nov-Apr	private	A wonderful day walk, with prominent lookouts giving an excellent overview of the Buffalo Plateau	171
Mt Difficult	2 days	moderate-demanding	Sep-Nov	private	Ascend to the northern Grampians' highest point for one of the best sunset seats in the country	152
Mt Feathertop & the Razorback	2 days	demanding	Dec-Apr	private	Enjoy wonderful mountain scenery from a prominent peak, and stroll among wildflowers and tall forests	164
Mt Speculation & the Crosscut Saw	2 days	moderate-demanding	Nov-Apr	private	Camp high on a peak, admire craggy ranges and traverse the spectacular Crosscut Saw ridge	168
Mt Stapylton	4-4½ hours	moderate-demanding	Sep-Nov	private	Exhilarating rock hop and scramble amid glorious sandstone walls	151
Prom Southern Circuit	3 days	moderate	Nov-May	shuttle service	Visit coasts both wild and gentle on Victoria's classic bushwalk, spending a night in a lighthouse cottage	176
Surf Coast Walk	2 days	easy	year-round	bus	Classic Great Ocean Road scenery, wandering above and below high cliffs	140
Werribee Gorge	2½-3 hours	easy-moderate	Sep-Nov	private	Discover a rugged gorge at Melbourne's edge as you hop downstream between swimming holes	130
<b>Tasmania</b>						
Cape Pillar	3 days	moderate	all year	private	Walk along the edge of the highest sea cliffs in Australia, with bush- and heath-cloaked hills above and the sea foaming around sea stacks below	200
Frenchmans Cap	4 days	moderate-demanding	Nov-Apr	bus	Trek across muddy plains and through tangled rainforest to a convoluted quartzite massif cradling dark lakes and dominated by the most distinctive mountain in the west	229

The Walks	Duration	Difficulty	Best Time	Transport	Summary	Page
<b>Tasmania</b> <i>continued</i>						
Freycinet Peninsula Circuit	2 days	easy-moderate	all year	bus	Experience beautiful coastal walking featuring sandy beaches and granite peaks, then lounge on one of the most scenic beaches in Australia	242
Mt Anne & Eliza Plateau	7-8½ hours	moderate-demanding	Nov-Apr	bus	See stunning mountain scenery around the highest peak in the southwest	209
Mt Field & Tarn Shelf Circuit	5-6 hours	moderate	Oct-Apr	private	Explore the glaciated uplands of Mt Field National Park, traversing snow gum woodland, alpine vegetation and bouldery crests, returning along the beautiful Tarn Shelf	206
Mt Rufus & Shadow Lake	6-8 hours	moderate	Nov-Apr	bus	Traverse a wide variety of vegetation to and from a grand mountain viewpoint, relaxing beside a tranquil lake on your return	212
Mt Wellington & the Organ Pipes Circuit	5-7 hours	moderate	all year	bus	Wander forest and alpine tracks on Hobart's 'mountain', featuring great views and the dramatic Organ Pipes	196
Overland Track	6-7 days	moderate	Dec-Mar	bus	Traverse the highest ground in Tasmania, taking in wild alpine moors, craggy peaks and swathes of luxuriant rainforest on the most famous multi-day walk in Australia	214
South Coast Track	6-7 days	moderate-demanding	Dec-Mar	plane, bus	Traverse remote beaches, buttongrass plains and rainforest in the remote southwest wilderness, with spectacular scenery and views of the inland mountains	236
Walls of Jerusalem	3 days	easy-moderate	Nov-Apr	bus	Visit a compact alpine area littered with biblical names, walking beneath extensive cliffs, past glacial tarns and through quiet pencil pine forests	232
<b>South Australia</b>						
Flinders Chase Coastal Trek	2 days	moderate	Sep-Apr	private	Isolated cliffs and bush brimming with wildlife at Kangaroo Island's western edge	258
Heysen Highlight	3 days	moderate	Aug-Oct	shuttle service	Sample Australia's most daunting long-distance trail and be rewarded with the best views of Wilpena Pound	269
Mt Remarkable Gorges	2 days	moderate	Sep-Oct	private	Link two superb gorges, and enjoy views across plains, ocean and mountains	263
Wilpena Pound	2 days	easy-moderate	May-Oct	bus	A simple circuit that connects the best features of the Pound	266
Yurrebilla Trail	3 days	easy-moderate	all year	train, bus	Walk close to, but far removed from, the city, passing through seven national and conservation parks	253
<b>Western Australia</b>						
Bibbulmun Karri & Coast	4 days	moderate	Sep-Nov	private	Flit between tall forest and a wildflower-rimmed coast on a section of the great Bibbulmun Track	290
Bluff Knoll	2½-3 hours	moderate	Sep-Oct	shuttle service	Make a straightforward climb to southern WA's highest peak	299
Cape to Cape Track	7 days	moderate	Jun-Dec	private	See whales and waves on WA's most enticing coastal walk	279
Nancy Peak & Devil's Slide	2½-3 hours	easy-moderate	Sep-Nov	private	Get your granite fix by wandering through an island of karri forest to smooth summit domes	296
Toolbrunup Peak	2½-3 hours	moderate-demanding	Sep-Oct	shuttle service	Gymnastic ascent through a scree gully to the heart of the Stirling Range	300
<b>Northern Territory</b>						
Barrk Sandstone Bushwalk	5-7 hours	moderate-demanding	May-Sep	private	Short, challenging scramble over Nourlangie Rock from one superb Aboriginal art site to another	312
Jatbula Trail	4 days	moderate	May-Sep	shuttle service	The Top End's best trail with rock art, waterfalls and plunge pools	315
Larapinta Trail Highlight	2 days	moderate	Apr-Sep	shuttle service	Mountain hops broken by gorges as you sample this epic trail across the West MacDonnell Ranges	322
Ormiston Gorge & Pound	3½-4 hours	easy-moderate	Apr-Sep	shuttle service	Stunning panoramas of ancient landforms, including a dramatic, brick-red gorge and serene waterhole	321
<b>Queensland</b>						
Coomera Circuit	8 hours	moderate	May-Oct	bus	One of Lamington's best waterfall hikes along a spectacular gorge	340
Great Walk Fraser Island	5 days	moderate	Apr-Oct	ferry, 4WD taxi	Pass lofty rainforests, refreshing lakes and desert-like sandblows on the world's largest sand island	342
Green Mountains	2 days	moderate	May-Oct	bus	Pristine rainforests, cascading waterfalls and sweeping panoramas from graded tracks	335
Mt Bartle Frere	2 days	demanding	May-Oct	private, bus	A rewarding walk through ancient rainforests to bag Queensland's highest peak	353
Ships Stern Circuit	6 hours	moderate	May-Oct	bus	Experience Aboriginal legends and a ship-shaped bluff along Lamington's escarpments	338
Thorsborne Trail	4 days	moderate	Apr-Sep	ferry, bus	Sandy beaches, plunge pools and pristine wilderness on one of the world's classic walks	349

# The Authors



## ANDREW BAIN

Growing up in Adelaide, Andrew once believed the great outdoors was a place far away, so it was with delight that he rediscovered his home state (among other places) for this book. A reformed sportswriter, he now writes about adventure and travel for publications around the world. He has trekked, cycled and paddled across parts of five continents and is the author of *Headwinds*, the story of a 20,000km bike ride around Australia, and Lonely Planet's *A Year of Adventures*.

### Walk My Way

For me, Australian walking begins from the bottom up – in Tasmania, where nights on Wineglass Bay (p244) or days among the mountain assortments of Cradle Mountain–Lake St Clair National Park (p214) are unsurpassed. A couple of bushwalking's lesser lights, South Australia and Western Australia, deserve greater attention. The forests along the Bibbulmun Karri & Coast walk (p290) and the forest-less approach into Wilpena Pound along the Heysen Highlight (p268) are exceptional. The Victorian Alps are my mountain playground of choice – the Razorback (p164) and Crosscut Saw (p168) are as sharpening to the senses as their names might suggest. And all good things should end on Hinchinbrook Island (p349) – 32km, nine beaches, four days; leisure with your boots on.



## LINDSAY BROWN

Having recently explored the Top End for Lonely Planet's *Northern Territory & Central Australia*, it was time to park the 4WD and hit the trails. As a Lonely Planet author Lindsay has contributed to several titles, including *Australia*, *Queensland & the Great Barrier Reef* and *East Coast Australia*. He has trekked in Pakistan, Nepal and India, and bushwalked in most states of Australia.

### LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

Why is our travel information the best in the world? It's simple: our authors are independent, dedicated travellers. They don't research using just the Internet or phone, and they don't take freebies in exchange for positive coverage. They travel widely, to all the popular spots and off the beaten track. They personally visit thousands of hotels, restaurants, cafés, bars, galleries, palaces, museums and more – and they take pride in getting all the details right, and telling it how it is. For more, see the authors section on [www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com).



## IAN CONNELLAN

Ian's first bushland walking experiences were near his childhood Sydney home, and he'd graduated to multiday walks in the Blue Mountains and other national parks by his early years in high school. Alpine and cross-country skiing and bicycle touring were added to his outdoor-rec mix while he completed university studies in literature, history and professional writing. After this he somehow endured several years of ski-bumming before settling down as a journalist, editor and freelance travel writer/photographer. Widely published by anyone who'll put up with him, Ian is based near the coast in Sydney with his family (partner x 1, children x 2). This is his fourth Lonely Planet title.



## JOHN & LYN DALY

Weekend forays into the bush after a torrid week in computers were the beginning. Outdoor escapes became addictive – no phones, no staff, no hassles! It was time for a career change. Wine tasters and restaurant critics were covered, so John and Lyn turned their long-time passion for bushwalking, travel and conservation into an occupation. They produced their first *Take A Walk* book and six others followed. Their 'job' allows them to pursue another passion: long-distance walking, highlighted by end-to-ending the Australian Alps Walking Track. They regularly write for outdoor and travel magazines and share experiences with conservation groups and bushwalking clubs. The pay might not be flash, but the memories and experiences are worth millions.



## GRANT DIXON

Wandering in the wilderness of his native Tasmania provided inspiration for Grant's geological training, and subsequent work with nature conservation organisations and the Tasmanian Parks & Wildlife Service. Spending part of each year trekking, climbing and photographing wild and remote areas of the planet, Grant has explored parts of all seven continents and many different environments over the past 30 years, from the Antarctic to the Arctic and Himalayan summits to a South Pacific island. He is a co-author of Lonely Planet's *Trekking in the Central Andes* and *Walking in the Alps*, contributed to the previous edition of *Walking in Australia*, and is also a widely published photographer.



### GLENN VAN DER KNIJFF

Glenn grew up in Bright, at the foot of the Victorian Alps, and completed his first walk at the tender age of 11. Living near the mountains ensured he acquired a passion for snow skiing as well as bushwalking. In the last 20 years Glenn has walked extensively in the High Country of Victoria and Kosciuszko National Park, and he's even written his own book, *Bushwalks in the Victorian Alps*. Though he's worked at Lonely Planet since 1997, his previous job for *Wild* (a magazine devoted to Australian rucksack sports) unwittingly gave him the impetus to travel overseas, and he's since visited Nepal, Canada, the USA and Europe to expand his walking and skiing experiences.

### CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS

**Jon Muir** wrote the foreword (p9) and boxed text 'Bush Tucker' (p31) in the Environment chapter. Jon has devoted his life to outdoor adventure, including five Mt Everest expeditions, a 52-day solo sea-kayaking journey and treks to both Poles, in addition to crossing Australia on foot in 2001. He was named the Australian Geographic Society's Adventurer of the Year in 2001.

**Tim Flannery** wrote the boxed text 'Environmental Challenges' (p34) in the Environment chapter. Tim is a naturalist, explorer and author of a number of award-winning books, including *Country* and *The Future Eaters*. Tim lives in Adelaide where he is director of the South Australian Museum and a professor at the University of Adelaide.

## Walk Descriptions

This book contains 60 walk descriptions ranging from day trips to the multicountry megawalks, plus suggestions for other walks, side trips and alternative routes. Each walk description has a brief introduction outlining the natural and cultural features you may encounter, plus information to help you plan your walk – transport options, level of difficulty, time frame and any permits required.

Day walks are often circular and are located in areas of uncommon beauty. Multiday walks include information on camp sites, mountain huts, hostels or other accommodation, and places where you can obtain water and supplies.

### Times & Distances

These are provided only as a guide. Times are based on actual walking time and do not include stops for snacks, taking photographs, rests or side trips. Be sure to factor these in when planning your walk. Distances are provided but should be read in conjunction with altitudes. Significant elevation changes can make a greater difference to your walking time than lateral distance.

In most cases, the daily stages are flexible and can be varied. It is important to recognise that short stages are sometimes recommended in order to acclimatise in mountain areas or because there are interesting features to explore en route.

### Level of Difficulty

Grading systems are always arbitrary. However, having an indication of the grade may help you choose between walks. Our authors use the following grading guidelines:

**Easy** – a walk on flat terrain or with minor elevation changes usually over short distances on well-travelled routes with no navigational difficulties.

**Moderate** – a walk with challenging terrain, often involving longer distances and steep climbs.

**Demanding** – a walk with long daily distances and difficult terrain with significant elevation changes; may involve challenging route-finding and high-altitude or glacier travel.

### True Left & True Right

The terms 'true left' and 'true right', used to describe the bank of a stream or river, sometimes throw readers. The 'true left bank' simply means the left bank as you look downstream.

# Planning

Australian walking is an evolving creature. At its core it is about self-sufficiency; the simple act of dragging your food, water and bed with you through the bush, seeing only natural architecture along the way, and with wildlife as your major companion. This remains the essence of bushwalking, but it's no longer the only option. Paths such as the Bibbulmun Track (p290) and Larapinta Trail (p322) have redefined bushwalking infrastructure, alleviating some of the exhaustive forethought required to step out into the bush. Increasingly, there are also opportunities to make your planning as simple as calling ahead to book a bed at a B&B, or securing your place on a guided walk.

Plan ahead according to your walk – a track in the Northern Territory or outback New South Wales might require copious preparation, while a stroll near the city might require no more than a packed lunch and a transport timetable. This book is designed to be one of your preparation tools as well as your track guide – it will be the first step of your walk.

## WHEN TO WALK

Australia is a land for all seasons, balanced between north and south, tropical and temperate. Whenever you fancy a walk, somewhere in the country is in its prime. When the Northern Territory and Queensland are afloat in their wet season (October to March), southern regions such as Victoria, Tasmania and Kosciuszko National Park beckon. During winter (June to August), snow and severe weather can make walking hazardous, if not impossible, in much of Tasmania and the High Country of New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria, but it is gloriously warm across central Australia (if you can excuse the freezing nights); and Queensland and the Top End have wrung themselves dry of humidity.

Spring (September to November) and autumn (March to May) are anything but seasonal fillers, offering the finest walking conditions across much of the country. South Australia and Western Australia (WA) are at their best – spring means copious wildflowers in WA – while NSW and Victoria are also balanced between their summer heat and winter rains.

Australia's great holiday migration is primarily over the summer school holidays (late December through January), but it shouldn't mean any travel disruption – just a few more people to weave around if you are walking along the coast.

## COSTS & MONEY

In recent years the Australian dollar has been holding its own against currencies such as the greenback and the euro, so it is a less economical destination than in the days when the Aussie dollar more resembled a peso. That said, daily living costs such as food and accommodation are

still fairly inexpensive. The biggest cost in any trip to Australia will be transport, simply because it is such a large country.

As a walker you have an automatic financial advantage, since you will almost certainly be spending some nights sleeping in a tent, often free of charge. Off the trail, your budget will be determined by the kind of travel you are doing. If you are touring around between walks, doing some general sightseeing, prefer to stay in at least midrange accommodation and have a stomach that demands regular restaurant visits, then \$90 to \$110 per day (per person travelling as a couple) should do it.

If you are travelling more frugally, camping or staying in hostels, cooking your own meals, limiting your entertainment to the walking itself, and moving around by bus (or in your own vehicle), you could probably eke out an existence on \$50 per day. For a budget that realistically enables you to have a good time, open your purse a little wider to allow \$70 per day.

If you're not already geared up, a significant expense can be fitting yourself out with the appropriate clothing and equipment. See p389 for advice and options.

See Climate (p361) for more information.

## HOW MUCH?

Camping ground (tent & 2 people) \$20-25

B&B (per person sharing) \$60

Topographic map \$10

Litre of Shellite \$5

Post-walk pub meal \$15-30

See also Lonely Planet Index, inside back cover.

## DON'T HIT THE TRACK WITHOUT...

- getting over your fear of snakes (p384)
- map and compass (p390)
- checking for Total Fire Bans (p25)
- checking the permits and fees situation (p371)
- plenty of drinking water (p385)

## GUIDED & GROUP WALKS

Sometimes you just want somebody else to point the way or carry your stuff. Try the following walking organisations:

### Australia

**Auswalk** (☎ 02-6457 2220; www.auswalk.com.au) Guided and self-guided walks along the east coast, Tasmania and central Australia.

**Ecotrek** (☎ 08-8346 4155; www.ecotrek.com.au) A large selection of South Australian walks, plus the High Country and Tasmania.

**Nature Bound Australia** (☎ 07-3254 1911; www.natureboundaustralia.com) Tours that include day walks along many of the trails in this book.

**Parktrek** (☎ 03-9486 7070; www.parktrek.com) Walks throughout Victoria, plus the Budawang, Flinders Ranges, Kangaroo Island, central Australia, Snowy Mountains and Tasmania.

**Willis' Walkabouts** (☎ 08-8985 2134; www.bushwalkingholidays.com.au) Walks along the Larapinta Trail and through Kakadu.

**World Expeditions** (☎ 1300 720 000; www.worldexpeditions.com.au) Walks along the Overland Track, Freycinet Peninsula, South Coast Track, Walls of Jerusalem, Flinders Ranges, Larapinta Trail, Bibbulmun Track and Cape to Cape Track.

### UK

**HF Holidays** (☎ 0208-905 9556; www.hfholidays.co.uk) A 16-day Tasmania tour focusing on the major walking areas.

**KE Adventure Travel** (☎ 0176-877 3966; www.keadventure.com) A 15-day trekking tour in the Blue Mountains and Snowy Mountains.

**Walks Worldwide** (☎ 0152-424 2000; www.walksworldwide.com) A broad range of walks in eastern Australia, including Lamington, the High Country, Overland Track, Blue Mountains, Croajingolong, Grampians and the Great Ocean Road.

### USA

**Wilderness Travel** (☎ 1-800-368 2794; www.wildernesstravel.com) Offers a Wild Tasmania tour that includes walks at Cradle Mountain, Mt Field and Freycinet.

To find local operators on specific walks, see the relevant regional chapter. For information on walking clubs around the country, see p358.

## BACKGROUND READING

The tradition of travel literature has barely touched the Australian walking scene. Not here do you find personal accounts of discovery through walking: Australia's *Snow Leopard* remains to be written. A recent exception was Jon Muir's diary-style *Alone Across Australia*, the story of his unassisted 128-day walk from Port Augusta to Burketown, one of the great contemporary Australian journeys.

Paddy Pallin's *Bushwalking and Camping*, first published in 1934 and now into its 14th edition, is something of a walkers' bible, covering everything from bushcraft and first-aid to tips on stuffing everything into your backpack. Paddy's autobiography *Never Truly Lost* is a fascinating account of bushwalking in a bygone era and of his personal philosophy (for more about Paddy Pallin, see the boxed text p389).

*Being Outside* by Everest summiteer Tim Macartney Snape is a comprehensive how-to guide to the outdoors – learn everything from types of sleeping bag to the pathology of hypothermia.

*Classic Wild Walks of Australia* by Robert Rankin takes a glance at walks in 25 regions of the country, complemented by a beautiful set of photos. *Classic Walks of Australia* by Sven Klinge features thumbnail descriptions of around 180 walks. Hardback and huge, both books are more for the coffee table than the backpack.

### SEASONED WALKERS

Seasons, as much as scenery, can be a deciding factor in the tracks you choose to walk. If you want your visit to coincide with nature's moods, try one of the following.

#### Summer

Brutal heat across much of the country brings Tasmania and the High Country of NSW and Victoria into their own. Head out into Kosciuszko National Park (p82), the Victorian Alps (p155) or Tasmania's west (p204). If you are in northern Australia, you might join the summer exodus to Lamington National Park (p333) to beat the lowland heat.

#### Autumn

As a general rule, autumn provides the most stable weather conditions across much of the country, making it arguably the finest walking season of all. Australia's trees are not noted for the kind of deciduous colouring that so electrifies forests in many other parts of the world. One exception is the deciduous beech (or 'fagus') in Tasmania. This tree changes colour around late April, and is best sighted along the Overland Track (p214) or on Mt Field (p206).

#### Winter

Follow the migration north for the best of the walking conditions. Wander along the Jatbula Trail (p315) or sample the Larapinta Trail (p322). In northern Queensland, both the Thorsborne Trail (p349) and Mt Bartle Frere (p353) are exceptional in winter.

If you can brave the chill in the south, you will witness the ocean's full ferocity around Cape Pillar (p200) and the Great Ocean Walk Highlight (p143).

#### Spring

There is no better place to be during spring than in Western Australia, where the wildflowers turn the earth into a Monet canvas. All the walks in the WA chapter feature great spring floral displays. You need not venture far out of Sydney, however, to find a decent coating of wildflowers, with both the Bouddi Coast (p55) and Royal National Park Coast Track (p58) rich in flowering heath. This is also the most comfortable and beautiful season to walk in the Flinders Ranges (p261).

## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Australia Online** ([www.australiaonline.com.au](http://www.australiaonline.com.au)) Includes an A-Z of all things ocker.

**Australian Tourist Commission** ([www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)) Official tourism site with nationwide info for visitors.

**Bushwalking in Australia** ([www.bushwalking.org.au](http://www.bushwalking.org.au)) NSW-centric – it is the website of the Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW – but with links to walking clubs, and titbits on food and equipment.

**Department of the Environment & Heritage** ([www.deh.gov.au/parks/links/index.html](http://www.deh.gov.au/parks/links/index.html)) Info on the handful of Commonwealth national parks and links to the state-run national park authorities.

**Guide to Australia** ([www.csu.edu.au/australia](http://www.csu.edu.au/australia)) Links to sundry domestic sites focusing on attractions, culture, the environment, transport etc.

**John Chapman – Bushwalking in Australia** ([www.john.chapman.name/bushwalk.html](http://www.john.chapman.name/bushwalk.html)) Good overview of many of the country's major tracks.

**LonelyPlanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) Talk the walk on the dedicated walking, trekking and mountaineering branch of the Thorn Tree forum.

**Yahoo! Groups: bushwalking** (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/bushwalking>) Discussion group on all things bushwalking.

# Environment

Separated from other lands for around 33 million years, Australia has been on a unique evolutionary journey, moulding wildlife as though it was an abstract art form – mammals with pouches, a pin-cushion that lays eggs, a monotreme with the bill of a duck – and grinding down its ancient mountains even as the rest of the world has been erecting theirs. Is it any wonder they call it the land down under?

## THE LAND

Australia contains ancient rocks and evidence of the earliest life, but the landscape itself is very old in many areas. While northern hemisphere land masses were scraped clean by glaciers during recent ice ages, this was not so in much of Australia, which retains landscape and soil fea-

### TREADING LIGHTLY

The Australian bush is more fragile than its sun-hardened image might appear, and hordes of bushwalkers can easily upset the ecological balance. To that end, national parks and bushwalking clubs have adopted Minimal Impact Bushwalking Codes – you will find an example at [www.bushwalking.org.au/code.html](http://www.bushwalking.org.au/code.html). You don't need to be able to recite them like a pledge of allegiance: everything in the codes is common bush sense. The following guidelines are based on these codes.

#### Rubbish

- Take plastic bags for your rubbish and if you have carried it in, carry it out. Carry out rubbish left by other people.
- Don't bury or burn rubbish. Burning creates pollution and buried rubbish might be dug up by animals and scattered.
- If walking in scrubby country, don't carry foam sleeping mats or items in plastic bags on the outside of your pack.

#### Human Waste

- If there is no toilet, bury your waste by digging a hole 15cm deep and at least 100m from any watercourse and camp site. Take a trowel or large tent peg for this purpose. Cover the waste and paper with soil.
- At many national park camp sites there are composting toilets. Do not place rubbish in these toilets as it can affect the composting process.

#### Feeding Animals

- Don't feed animals, no matter how cute they are, and secure rubbish and food away from prying paws. Feeding makes wild creatures dependent on humans for food and can cause diseases such as lumpy jaw – a fatal condition found in marsupials, causing them to starve to death.

#### Camping

- Use an existing camp site rather than creating a new one. Avoid grassed areas; choose sandy or hard surfaces.
- Don't dig trenches around your tent to divert rainwater; use a waterproof groundsheet.

tures caused by the cumulative effects of more than 100 million years of weathering.

In general, Australia has grown from west to east. Western Australia's Pilbara region contains both Australia's oldest rocks (3.3 billion years) and evidence of some of the oldest known organisms: stromatolites (more than 2.5 billion years ago). Younger (600 million years) rocks in the Flinders Ranges contain fossils of jellyfish-like organisms, the first evidence of multicelled life. Complex life burst forth worldwide soon after.

During the last billion years Australia has lain in the centre of two supercontinents, ancient Rodinia and more-recent Gondwana. The latter contained all the major southern landmasses and was assembled by 520 million years ago. During the subsequent 150 million years, warm and shallow seas covered parts of Australia, and volcanic arcs and deeper water lay to the east. Cycles of sedimentation and deformation built new crust, the present eastern Australia.

Global cooling about 330 million years ago, with Gondwana near the South Pole, plunged Australia into an extended glacial period. As the

### Washing

- Don't use detergents or toothpaste in or near watercourses; try to use sand or a scourer (not detergent) to clean dishes.
- If washing with soap, use a water container at least 50m from any watercourse. Disperse the waste water widely so it filters through the soil before it returns to the creek.
- Strain food scraps from dishwashing water and carry them out in your rubbish.

### Fires & Total Fire Bans

- Campfires are not allowed in fuel-stove-only areas.
- Carry a fuel stove to avoid campfires; fires inevitably result in some scarring of the land.
- Fires of any kind (including fuel stoves) are prohibited on days of Total Fire Ban. In remote areas, regard any hot, dry, windy day as a fire ban day.
- If having a campfire, use an existing fireplace rather than making a new one. If there are multiple fireplaces, use the major one – you might even consider dismantling the others.
- Don't surround fireplaces with rocks; instead, clear away all flammable material for at least 2m. Use the minimum of dead, fallen wood.
- Be absolutely certain the fire is extinguished. Drown the embers with water – sand and soil won't extinguish a fire. A fire is only safe to leave when you can comfortably put your hand on it.
- Place your stove on hard, nonliving surfaces, not vegetation. Cooking on vegetation can cause scorching from radiant heat – you may not see the effect but it can come through over subsequent days.

### Low-Impact Walking

- Use existing tracks. Don't cut corners to bypass zigzags.
- Walk through muddy or waterlogged sections of track; walking around the edge only increases the size of the pool.
- Avoid walking on sensitive vegetation. Minimise walking on loose ground, scree, dunes and marshes.



climate thawed 40 million years later, sediments, then cold peat swamps, filled subsiding basins along the east coast: Australia's future black-coal deposits. Sands that would become the cliffs of the Blue Mountains and rocks of the Sydney region were deposited subsequently in deltas and floodplains. Despite Australia's polar location, the climate continued to warm, with the development of arid inland riverine plains. Lush vegetation developed in eastern Australia when warm and humid conditions developed, and dinosaurs and early mammals roamed the land.

Crustal extension within Gondwana began about 180 million years ago, heralded by the injection of molten rock into the crust – now Tasmania's dolerite. The separation of Australia and Antarctica and the opening of the Tasman Sea both began 100 million years ago, at about the same time the first platypus appears in the fossil record. The opening of the Tasman Sea ended after less than 20 million years, but the Australian Plate has continued to move northeast by 7cm per year since, with northern Australia reaching the tropics about 25 million years ago.

The rise of Australia's Eastern Highlands, or Great Divide, and the formation of the Great Escarpment along its eastern margin, were associated with the opening of the Tasman Sea. But its subsequent erosion, in particular gorge incision and valley widening along the Great Escarpment, has been remarkably slow, a reflection of the tectonic stability of this part of Australia.

Australia and Antarctica had fully separated by 33 million years ago; Australia had finally become the island continent. The Antarctic Circumpolar Current then became established in the new Southern Ocean, triggering the refrigeration of Antarctica and increasing aridity in Australia about 15 million years ago, thus ending a 75-million-year period during which Australia and Antarctica were heavily forested and drained by abundant rivers and lakes.

Some uplift of the Central Australian mountain ranges occurred hundreds of millions of years ago. However, uplift of the Mt Lofty and Flinders Ranges has occurred over the last 50 million years, accelerating during the last 10 million, suggesting some of Australia's central mountains have formed from rejuvenated crustal activity and are not just worn down remnants of older, higher ranges. Further west, the Nullarbor Plain limestones were uplifted at the same time, facilitating the formation of one of the world's most extensive cave systems.

Australia is the only continent lacking active volcanoes, but this has not always been so and the most recent volcanic phase has barely ended. Basalt volcanoes and lava fields occurred all down the eastern margin from 70 million to just 4600 years ago, the latter eruption near Mt Gambier probably witnessed by the local Aboriginal people. Northern NSW's Border Ranges are the remnant of a 22-million-year-old basalt shield volcano, the eroded caldera being one of the largest in the world.

The gross shape of the Australian coastline reflects the Gondwana break-up fracture pattern, but at a detailed level the coast has evolved from a combination of drowning and erosion of rocky coastal areas, and recent deposition in deltas and along sandy coastlines. Sea levels rose and fell by more than 100m over the last one to two million years, with shorelines migrating in response to the waxing and waning of several ice ages; the present level was attained only 6500 years ago.

Around 1300 sq km of Tasmania's highlands was glaciated during the last ice age, peaking 18,000 years ago, but on the mainland only a small area of ice formed near Mt Kosciuszko. However, the ice ages were periods of lowered precipitation as well as temperature, and did have a

continent-wide effect with a dramatic influence on the character and distribution of vegetation. Many of Australia's desert dunes are probably relict features from the last ice age.

## WILDLIFE

For all its visibility on postcard stands and road signs, Australia's wildlife can play pretty hard to get. In the main, the animals are more sensible than the walkers, avoiding the heat of day and stirring only for nocturnal activity. This means your days are unlikely to be spent among warm-blooded company, though wildlife parades past camp in the evenings and early mornings are common. If you are walking in Tasmania, where the animals think walkers are some form of butler service, you might even find yourself cursing the day possums were given dexterous, backpack-opening claws.

## Animals MAMMALS

The kangaroo is as symbolically Australian as Uluru, though it comes in about 39 flavours (counting wallabies). Fortunately, it seems to have so baffled the earliest settlers it finished up with a nomenclature that makes species simple to identify: if you see a kangaroo that is red in colour, it will be a red kangaroo; if you see a wallaby with yellowish feet in a rocky gorge, it will be a yellow-footed rock wallaby.

The most majestic roo is the **red kangaroo**, which can stand up to 1.8m tall. Restricted to the arid inland, only walkers in the Flinders Ranges (p261) are likely to see these bush giants. A more common sight is the **eastern grey kangaroo**, marginally smaller (and a lot greyer) than big red and found throughout eastern Australia. The **western grey kangaroo**, which looks very much like the eastern grey, isn't limited by its name, ranging across southern Australia.

Wallabies are classified as kangaroo species weighing less than 25kg, and there are several you might see on your wanders. The **red-necked wallaby**, with its characteristic reddish nape, is the most commonly seen along the east coast and Tasmania, while the dark **swamp wallaby** is also a frequent sight. Rock wallabies can be more reclusive than Ken Kesey, but early mornings and dusk in the gorges along the Larapinta Trail (p322) will reveal the endangered **black-footed rock wallaby**. On the Heysen Highlight (p269), watch for **yellow-footed rock wallabies**, the icon of the Flinders Ranges.

The **euro**, or common wallaroo, is found on rocky hillsides across the country. It is more solidly built and has a rougher, shaggier coat than red or grey kangaroos. The males' colouring varies from grey-black to reddish-brown to fawn, while the females are usually smaller and paler.

If you are going to reliably see any one mammal, it will be the **brushtail possum**, the largest and most boisterous of Australia's possums. Renowned for making a racket on suburban roofs, brushtails are no less bold in the bush, and on many walks, especially in Tasmania, you will need to guard your food against these bushy thieves. More reticent is the **ringtail possum**, with its white-ringed prehensile tail used for climbing.

The **koala** is atop everybody's list of wildlife darlings, at least until you have slept anywhere near a randy male koala grunting like a wild boar. With tufted ears and a hard black nose, it is among the easiest marsupials to spot during the day, often resting in a low fork of a eucalypt; manna gums are a favourite. You will find koalas along much of the east coast and also in South Australia, where they have been reintroduced after becoming extinct.

Read about the 400-million-year greening of Gondwana in Mary White's book of the same name.

The Finke River, which runs through the West MacDonnell Ranges and floods out into the Simpson Desert, is claimed to be the world's oldest river, at around 350 million years.

For a more complete look at Australian critters and their distribution, see Lonely Planet's *Watching Wildlife Australia*.

An apocryphal legend suggests that 'kangaroo' is an Aboriginal word for 'don't know'. When James Cook first saw this strange creature, he supposedly asked an Aboriginal man what it was. The man answered that he didn't know... 'kangaroo'.

The **common wombat** is another bit of bush cuddliness that walkers in New South Wales, Victoria and Tassie might encounter. With its vaguely bear-like shape and amble, it looks cumbersome but can hit speeds of up to 40km/h. Those large burrows beside the track and the cube-shaped scat uncannily balanced atop rocks are the wombat's handiwork.

One creature you won't want to cuddle is the **short-beaked echidna**. It has a coat of long spines on its back and an elongated, beak-like snout perfect for catching ants and termites, its main food. It is often seen during the day in cooler climates, usually nosing about or ploughing open termite mounds and logs with its huge claws. If an echidna notices you, it will generally burrow frantically, leaving only its spines exposed. Echidnas are found throughout Australia.

Along with the echidna, the **platypus** is the world's last remaining monotreme, or egg-laying mammal. It is something of a jigsaw, with a softish, duck-like bill, short legs, webbed feet and a short, beaver-like tail. It is confined to the eastern mainland and Tasmania, and you are not going to see a platypus on many walks, though the two ends of the Overland Track (p214) – Lake St Clair and Dove Lake – offer hope.

As the name suggests, you will find the **Tasmanian devil** only in Tasmania. As stocky as a small pig, with white stripes across its black chest, its ferocious name gives it a largely undeserved notoriety, though watch a group of devils arguing over roadkill and you will wonder. It has solitary and nocturnal habits, either scavenging or hunting vertebrates. If you hear a banshee scream in the night, it is likely to be a Tassie devil but it is not about to come charging through your tent.

Perhaps the only mammal more notorious than the Tassie devil is the **dingo**, Australia's so-called native dog, which probably arrived about 4000 years ago with Asian sailors. Common in much of the outback (and prolific on Fraser Island, p346), it usually has a bronze tinge to its coat, and yips and howls rather than barks – if you hear barking, it is a wild dog not a dingo. The dingo is an efficient predator of rabbits but also attacks livestock.

## BIRDS

Australia has around 800 recorded bird species and they're likely to be the most visible of the animals you'll see while walking. They are most

active in the early morning and you will have a better chance of seeing a good variety if you set off early each day.

Australia's most recognisable birds are the **emu** and the **laughing kookaburra**. The former looks like an ostrich baked dry by the sun and is found across most of the country. When startled, it can hit speeds of 50km/h. You will almost certainly hear the laughing kookaburra (the largest member of the kingfisher family) before you see it, with its loud, cackling laugh, though it is also easily spotted. Closely related is the **blue-winged kookaburra**, found in the tropics.

If you are walking in spring, the **Australian magpie** will probably find you before you find it. This large black-and-white bird has one of the bush's most melodious songs, but can be highly territorial when breeding, swooping anything that comes near, including humans. The good news for walkers is that swooping seems more prevalent in urban areas than on walking tracks.

Looking like a cross between a crow and a magpie, the **pieb currawong** is one of the most regularly seen birds in the bush. This black bird has yellow eyes and a strip of white across its tail feathers. It is among the most gregarious of the birds you will encounter and has a piercing, almost parrot-like call.

The greatest sight you will see in the Australian skies is the freewheeling figure of a **wedge-tailed eagle**. The country's largest bird of prey has a wingspan of up to 2m and is named for the distinctive shape of its tail. Though 'wedgies' are found across Australia, they are most commonly seen in the interior.

Just as fascinating is the sight of a male bowerbird at work. This stocky, stout-billed bird builds a bower that he decorates with various coloured objects: the glossy-blue male **satin bowerbird** will use almost anything that's blue; the **golden bowerbird** uses pale-green moss, pale flowers and fruits; and the **great bowerbird** accumulates stones, shells, seeds and metallic objects.

Among the parrots and cockatoos you can expect to see, the **galah** and **sulphur-crested cockatoo** are prominent. The former is pink and grey in colour, while the latter is white and has a crest coloured like the rim of a volcano. It also has a shriek loud enough to wake the dead. The **black-cockatoo**, whether yellow-, red- or white-tailed, is another welcome sight. They can look like crows from a distance, but have a heavier, lazier wing motion and a call like a creaky door. The **crimson rosella** is a common sight – look for a flash of red through the trees – and the brilliantly coloured **rainbow lorikeet**, with its blue head, orange breast and green body, gathers in great numbers around flowering plants.

The **superb lyrebird**, which graces the Australian 10-cent coin, is a ground-dwelling bird. The male lyrebird has tail feathers that form a lyre shape when hoisted to attract a female. Its party trick is bush mimicry, copying almost any noise it has heard, from the calls of other birds to livestock and chainsaws. To hear a lyrebird running through its noises like a compilation CD is worth any amount of walking.

Walkers in Queensland will soon be aware of the **Australian brush-turkey**, with its bald red head and yellow wattles – it will be the bird trying to pilfer your food and rubbish bag. You might even start wishing Christmas dinner upon it.

## REPTILES

It is true that Australia has a few reptiles, but work under the assumption that they are at least as frightened of you as you are of them. Make some noise as you walk and you will most likely go unbothered.

Discover the curious world of the wombat in James Woodford's *The Secret Life of Wombats*.

When the first platypus specimens were sent to England in the late 18th century, they were thought to be a hoax.

Learn to pick one poo and paw from another in *Tracks, Scats and Other Traces* by Barbara Triggs.

Magpies usually swoop from behind. Painting eyes on the back of your hat or wearing sunglasses backwards can dissuade them from attacking.

For a bird identification guide that won't break your back, carry the *Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds* by Peter, Pat & Raoul Slater.

### DEVIL OF A DISEASE

In the last decade, the Tasmanian devil population has been decimated by a fatal condition known as devil facial tumour disease (DFTD). Beginning as small lesions on the face and in the mouth, DFTD develops into large and hideous cancers around the face and neck. Affected animals usually die within six months of the appearance of lesions.

First found in Tasmania's northeast in 1996, DFTD has since become prevalent throughout eastern, central and northern parts of the island – currently the west coast remains free of the disease. There has been a dramatic population decline in some of these areas, with estimates that around 50,000 animals have died from DFTD. As a result, Tasmanian devils have been listed as a vulnerable species.

Researchers predict that DFTD isn't likely to result in the extinction of Tasmanian devils, but the decline in the population may result in increased cat numbers and could allow foxes to establish in Tasmania, making it difficult for the Tassie devil population to recover.

If you see a sick Tasmanian devil, leave it be but report it to the wildlife management branch of Tasmania's Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment at <http://wildlife.enquiries@dpiwe.tas.gov.au>.

Australia has 130 species of snake and, despite the negative press, the majority are harmless (though it is always wise to assume otherwise). Warm, sunny conditions, such as the start of spring, are best for seeing snakes. It is difficult at a glance to tell one snake from another – most come in fetching shades of brown or black – though walkers in Lamington National Park might be treated to an array of rainforest pythons and tree snakes.

Bushfire-aware slogan in the Northern Territory: 'We Like Our Lizards Frilled Not Grilled'.

One reptile you will want to see is the goanna, or monitor lizard, a primordial reptile with the swagger of a cowboy. Australia has around 25 species of goanna, which can stretch to 2.5m. **Gould's goanna**, with cream or yellow spots, and the **lace monitor**, with white, cream or yellow scales forming a lace-like pattern, are often seen ambling through camps.

Only walkers on Hinchinbrook Island (p347) need browse up on crocodiles. The **saltwater (or estuarine) crocodile** is the one that causes all the fuss. Growing to 7m, it will attack and kill humans. It lives in large numbers on mangrove-rimmed Hinchinbrook, though there have been no recorded attacks. The **freshwater crocodile** is smaller, not so interested in the taste of humans, and can be distinguished from 'salties' by its narrow snout (salties have wide, box-like snouts). Kakadu is flush with crocs, but not along the walking route described in this book.

## Plants

### NATIVE GRASSES

Australia has more than 700 species of native grass, a couple of which will come to the particular notice of walkers.

**Spinifex** is the hardiest and most common desert plant, forming round clumps of needle-like leaves sprouting into softer, wheat-like seed stalks. The prickly dome is a haven for small desert mammals and reptiles, which shelter inside during the day.

### WHERE THE WILD THINGS ROAM

Animals you might expect to see on walks in this book include the following:

- Black-footed rock wallaby** Larapinta Trail Highlight (p320)
- Brushtail possum** Warrumbungle National Park (p110), Croajingolong National Park (p180)
- Common wombat** Wilsons Promontory National Park (p175), Blue Mountains (p62)
- Dingo** Fraser Island (p341)
- Eastern grey kangaroo** Warrumbungle National Park (p110)
- Eastern quoll** Overland Track (p214)
- Echidna** Warrumbungle National Park (p110)
- Emu** Warrumbungle National Park (p110)
- Frilled lizard** Kakadu National Park (p311)
- Great bowerbird** Nitmiluk National Park (p315)
- Koala** Yurrebilla Trail (p253), Warrumbungle National Park (p110)
- Lace Monitor** Croajingolong National Park (p180)
- Noisy pitta** Lamington National Park (p333)
- Platypus** Overland Track (p214)
- Red kangaroo** Flinders Ranges (p261)
- Ringtail possum** Wilsons Promontory National Park (p175), Overland Track (p214)
- Saltwater crocodile** Hinchinbrook Island (p347)
- Satin bowerbird** Lamington National Park (p333)
- Superb lyrebird** Blue Mountains (p62), Cathedral Range (p135)
- Tasmanian devil** Overland Track (p214), Freycinet Peninsula (p242)
- Western grey kangaroo** Stirling Range (p298), Walpole-Nornalup National Park (p290)

Largely confined to poorly drained plains in southwest Tasmania, **buttongrass** grows in tall tussocks, separated by bare patches of bog, and is a dirty word among walkers who have ever wallowed through it. Its leaves are tough and the flower for which it is named is a small cluster of white spikelets.

### SHRUBS & FLOWERS

The best known of the Australian shrubs (and among the easiest to identify) is the callistemon, or **bottlebrush**. Named for its brush-like flowers, it is found right across the country, and ranges in height from 1m to 10m. There are about 30 species with varying flower colours – red, white, pink and yellow among them – though species are difficult to distinguish. They are a favourite with some birds.

There are around 250 species of **grevillea**, of which 245 are endemic to Australia. They come in various sizes and flower colours and are found in the Australian Alps, forests, semi-arid country and near the coast. Most are small to medium in size, although the silky oak can grow to 25m and, covered with orange flowers, is one of Australia's most beautiful trees.

There are around 80 species of **tea-tree**, which are found in all states. Most species are large, dense bushes, not trees. Early settlers gave the tree its name after trying to brew tea from its leaves (what English settler

### BUSH TUCKER *Jon Muir*

Australia supported a rich culture for thousands of years on food that was hunted and gathered. Most of these foods can still be found in wilderness areas, although few people today recognise them. To sample these wild foods you need to be able to positively identify what you are about to put in your mouth to avoid accidental poisoning. Many edible bush foods have closely related plants that look very similar but are poisonous. Fortunately, most plants that are toxic to humans make themselves known by an unpleasant taste or burning sensation to the mouth (however, there are a few poisonous plants that do taste OK!). Before sampling any bush food you should touch it to your lip to check for taste or burning.

It is also important to note that flora and fauna are protected in national parks. Nothing here can be sampled, be it water lily petals or red kangaroo. However, parks are a great place to learn about identification of food because there is such a diverse range of bush tucker found in these ecologically intact remnants of wilderness.

In dune fields you can find lizards, native pear (a green vegetable that grows on a low bush and needs baking), pigweed (which has sweet, fleshy red flower petals with a salty aftertaste) and bloodwood galls. These galls are often tennis-ball-sized knobby growths on the western bloodwood. Both the gall itself and the grub found inside are edible.

Arid mountains are the home of the bush banana, which grows on spindly vines strung between trees and needs to be picked young and steamed or lightly roasted. In these rocky terrains, rock figs are often found above rock holes, with the fruit looking similar to (though smaller than) the common fig.

The Top End is probably the easiest place to find a diverse supply of bush foods, including burdekin plums, lilly pilly fruit, lady apples (crunchy and sweet) and the vicious green ant (if you are bold enough to disturb its nest!). Both the green ant larvae and the nests themselves are a source of food. The nest clump can be dropped into hot water to make a deliciously tangy lemon flavoured tea.

One of the best books on northern Australian bush food is *Bush Tucker Field Guide* by Les Hiddins, and for central Australia (and my all-time favourite), *Wild Food Plants of Australia* by Tim Low.

*Australian adventurer Jon Muir completed an unassisted traverse across Australia, from the Spencer Gulf to the Gulf of Carpentaria, surviving largely on bush food.*

could live without his tea, after all?). Flowers are mainly white and stalkless, and leaves are small.

The **pandani** is the tallest heath plant in the world, and though it looks more like a tropical palm you will only find it in west and southwest Tasmania. It can reach a height of 12m, and has a crown of stiff leathery leaves 1.5m long, with old, dead leaves or fronds forming a huge skirt around the lower trunk.

#### CYCADS & FERNS

The **MacDonnell Ranges cycad** is one of about 25 Australian species of the ancient cycad family, and will become familiar to walkers on the Larapinta Trail (p322). It is very slow-growing, and often found high on rocky hillsides and in gorges. It has palm-like fronds and seed cones grow at the tip of the short trunk on female plants; the male cones carry the pollen. The seeds are poisonous.

The **burrawang** grows along the NSW coast on sandy soils. The 2m-long palm-like fronds grow from ground level. Its red seeds are also poisonous.

The beautifully ornate **rough tree fern** and the **soft tree fern** are found in eastern Australia's temperate rainforests. Some reach a height of 20m and are capped by a crown of green fronds.

#### TREES

First among equals for Australian trees is the ubiquitous **eucalyptus**, or gum tree. Of the 700 species, all but about eight are endemic to Australia. Eucalypts vary in form and height from the tall, ruler-straight karri (confined to WA) and the towering mountain ash to the twisted snow gum. River red gums typically line watercourses, permanent or ephemeral, where their deep roots tap underground water reserves. The most widespread eucalypt, these massive, spreading trees grow to 45m high and can live for hundreds of years. River red gums are notorious shedders of branches, so never camp under this tree; people have been killed by falling branches. The hardy, shrub-like mallee is widespread in the interior. There are over 100 species of this ground-branching tree, which grows from a massive underground root (lignotuber) that enables it to survive fire.

Two of Australia's most striking trees are eucalypts: the snow gum and the ghost gum. The snow gum flourishes at higher altitudes than any other eucalyptus – up to 1700m in the High Country and Tasmanian highlands. It ranges from 1m to 20m in height and has smooth, whitish bark, sometimes patterned in racing stripes of green, yellow and red. Walkers in the MacDonnell Ranges won't fail to notice the bone-white trunks of the ghost gum, immortalised in Albert Namatjira's distinctive paintings.

Australian acacias are commonly known as **wattles** and around 700 species have been recorded. They vary from small shrubs to the blackwood, which grows up to 30m in height. The flowers come in all shades of yellow; most species flower during late winter and spring, bringing brilliant splashes of colour to the bush. The golden wattle, with its masses of bright-yellow flowers, is Australia's floral emblem. A less-showy acacia is the mulga, found across the arid inland. Its wide, funnel-like shape acts as its own water catchment, channelling rain to its base.

(Continued on page 45)

(Continued from page 32)

**Banksias** take their name from Sir Joseph Banks, the botanist who accompanied James Cook on his exploration of eastern Australia. Numbering about 70 species and confined to Australia, they are common on sandy soils. Most banksias sport upright cylindrical flower spikes up to 30cm long, covered with vibrant orange, red or yellow flowers. As the flowers die, the woody fruits appear. Aboriginal people dipped the banksia spikes in water to make a sweet drink.

**Casuarinas**, also known as she-oaks, are hardy trees characterised by wiry 'leaves' that are actually branchlets; the true leaves are small scales clustered in whorls along the branchlets. Casuarinas produce distinctive small knobby cones, and are widely distributed from the desert to the coast.

The **melaleuca**, also called paperbark or honey-myrtle, is easily recognised by its pale papery bark, which peels from the trunk in thin sheets. It is widespread on rocky ground, from the coast to semiarid inland areas. The flower spikes consist of many tiny filaments and range from cream through crimson to purple.

Australia has several families of native **conifer**, but they rarely dominate the vegetation as pines and spruces can in the northern hemisphere. Endemic to Tasmania, the pencil pine is found in areas of high rainfall: the central plateau and the southwest. A graceful tree, it grows to a height of about 15m. In coastal areas and inland semi-arid country in all states except WA, the Oyster Bay pine has distinctive segmented cones and reaches 6m in height. Foliage is typical of the *Callitris* genus: tiny scaly leaves arranged along branchlets. The **cypress pine** has hard, furrowed bark and its resistance to termites has made it a favourite bush building material.

The unusual looking **grass tree** is widespread in southeastern and southwestern Australia, mainly on sandy soils. It has very thin long leaves, a short thick trunk and a distinctive flower spike up to 3m tall, with tiny flowers massed along the upper half of a long stem. Walkers on the Cape to Cape Track (p279) will see the biggest of them.

Australia has about 50 species of **mangrove** – trees and shrubs adapted to daily flooding by salt water. Along northern coasts and estuaries, various species grow to around 30m, while at the southern limit of their distribution, in Victoria, they rarely exceed 5m. Mangroves have various ways of coping with inundation, with some breathing through aerial roots that are exposed at low tide. Walkers on Hinchinbrook Island (p347) will get the best look at mangroves.

#### WORLD HERITAGE WANDERS

Australia has 16 sites inscribed on the Unesco World Heritage list, including six that feature walks in this book:

- Central Eastern Rainforest Reserves (p119)
- Fraser Island (p341)
- Greater Blue Mountains Area (p62)
- Kakadu National Park (p311)
- Tasmanian Wilderness (p204)
- Wet Tropics of Queensland (p352)

For a full list of World Heritage sites, log on to <http://whc.unesco.org>.

Never again will you think of the humble gum tree as just a khaki-coloured bit of stick after reading Murray Bail's beautiful *Eucalyptus*.

**ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES** *Tim Flannery*

The European colonisation of Australia, commencing in 1788, heralded a period of catastrophic environmental upheaval, with the result that Australians today are struggling with some of the most severe environmental problems to be found anywhere. It may seem strange that a population of just 20 million, living in a country the size of continental USA, could inflict such damage on its environment, but Australia's long isolation, fragile soils and difficult climate have made it particularly vulnerable to human-induced change.

Damage to Australia's environment has been inflicted in several ways, the most important being the introduction of pest species, destruction of forests, overstocking of rangelands, inappropriate agriculture and interference with water flows. Beginning with the escape of domestic cats into the Australian bush shortly after 1788, a plethora of vermin (from foxes to wild camels and cane toads) has run wild in Australia, causing extinctions in the native fauna. One out of every 10 native mammals living in Australia prior to European colonisation is now extinct, and many more are highly endangered. Extinctions have also affected native plants, birds and amphibians.

The destruction of forests has also had a profound effect on the environment. Most of Australia's rainforests have suffered clearing, while conservationists continue to fight with loggers over the fate of the last unprotected stands of 'old growth'.

Many Australian rangelands have been chronically overstocked for more than a century, the result being the extreme vulnerability of both soils and rural economies to Australia's drought and flood cycle, as well as the extinction of many native species. The development of agriculture has involved land clearance and the provision of irrigation, and again the effect has been profound.

Clearing of the diverse and spectacular plant communities of the Western Australian wheat belt began just a century ago, yet today up to one-third of that country is degraded by salinisation of the soils. Between 70kg and 120kg of salt lies below every square metre of the region, and clearing of native vegetation has allowed water to penetrate deep into the soil, dissolving the salt crystals and carrying brine towards the surface.

In terms of financial value, just 1.5% of Australia's land surface provides over 95% of its agricultural yield, and much of this land lies in the irrigated regions of the Murray–Darling Basin. This is Australia's agricultural heartland, yet it is also under severe threat from salting of soils and rivers. Irrigation water penetrates into the sediments laid down in an ancient sea, carrying salt into the catchments and fields. If nothing is done, the lower Murray River will become too salty to drink in a decade or two, threatening the water supply of Adelaide, a city of over a million people.

Despite the scale of the biological crisis engulfing Australia, governments and the community have been slow to respond. In the 1980s coordinated action began to take place, but not until the '90s were major steps taken. The establishment of **Landcare Australia** ([www.landcareaustralia.com.au](http://www.landcareaustralia.com.au)), an organisation enabling people to effectively address local environmental issues, and the expenditure of \$2.5 billion through the National Heritage Trust Fund have been important national initiatives. Yet so difficult are some of the issues the nation faces that, as yet, little has been achieved in terms of halting the destructive processes.

Individuals are also banding together to help. Groups such as the **Australian Bush Heritage Fund** ([www.bushheritage.asn.au](http://www.bushheritage.asn.au)) and the **Australian Wildlife Conservancy** (AWC; [www.australianwildlife.org](http://www.australianwildlife.org)) allow people to donate funds and time to the conservation of native species. Some such groups have been spectacularly successful; the AWC, for example, already manages many endangered species over its 5260-sq-km holdings.

So severe are Australia's problems that it will take a revolution before they can be overcome, for sustainable practices need to be implemented in every arena of life – from farms to suburbs and city centres. Renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and water use lie at the heart of these changes, and Australians are only now developing the road map to sustainability that they so desperately need if they are to have a long-term future on the continent.

*Tim Flannery is a naturalist, explorer and writer. He lives in Adelaide where he is director of the South Australian Museum and a professor at the University of Adelaide.*

**NATIONAL PARKS & RESERVES**

It is safe to suggest that Australia has more national parks than any other country on earth. While Britain has 15 national parks and the USA has around 60, Australia has about 330 national parks.

Around 7% of Australia's land is protected as either national park or as some other form of nature conservation reserve. It doesn't sound huge, but it represents an area about twice the size of New Zealand. South Australia has the greatest amount of protected land, both in area (203,700 sq km) and proportion (20.7% of the state). This is followed by Tasmania (20%), Victoria (13.4%), WA (6.1%), NSW (4.8%), Queensland (3.1%) and the NT (2.8%).

State governments have authority over their own national parks. Contact details for each national park authority are provided in the regional chapters.

Many national parks have entry fees; for an overview see p368.

**ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

Romanticised around the world as an environmental exemplar, Australia has its share of ecological problems. It is also one of only four nations (with the USA, Monaco and Liechtenstein) yet to sign the Kyoto Protocol on the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions, so pack away any preconceptions that this green-and-gold nation is more interested in green than gold.

Wherever you wander, and as you drive to and from walks, you will encounter weeds, feral animals, deforestation, suburban sprawl and, most likely, salinity and water shortages. Even national parks are often located on previously logged or damaged lands.

Walking doesn't automatically remove you as part of the problem. The hardening of tracks and camp sites is evident throughout the country, while some responsibility for the spread or containment of *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, or dieback, rests with walkers. This destructive root rot affects a variety of woody species, and has killed great numbers of plants in many of the walking areas covered in this book. It is spread by the movement of dirt or plant material, so you should make certain that your gear is thoroughly washed after leaving an infected area. In many places, special cleaning stations are provided.

Conservation groups in Australia include the following:

**Australian Conservation Foundation** (ACF; ☎ 1800 332 510; [www.acfonline.org.au](http://www.acfonline.org.au))

**Foundation for National Parks & Wildlife** (☎ 02-9221 1949; [www.fnwp.com.au](http://www.fnwp.com.au))

**Friends of the Earth Australia** (☎ 03-9419 8700; [www.foe.org.au](http://www.foe.org.au))

**Greenpeace Australia Pacific** (☎ 02-9261 4666; [www.greenpeace.org.au](http://www.greenpeace.org.au))

**Landcare Australia** (☎ 1800 151 105; [www.landcareaustralia.org.au](http://www.landcareaustralia.org.au))

**Wilderness Society** (☎ 03-6270 1701; [www.wilderness.org.au](http://www.wilderness.org.au))

The first Green political party in the world was formed in Australia, arising from failed efforts to stop the flooding of Lake Pedder in Tasmania's southwest in the 1960s and early 1970s.

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