

# Notes for Walkers

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The National Trail is not a traditional bushwalk; it is a long distance trek. The key issues for a long distance walker revolve around the essential fact that you are the trekker, packhorse, and backup – all in one. So you need to be totally self-sufficient. Some walkers have relied on outside assistance but when it comes down to a critical situation you are likely to be well away from assistance and need to find your own way through any difficulty. You do not have the “luxury” of using an animal or mechanical device and rushing 20 or more kilometres to a point of assistance. You will have to walk it! If your leg is broken or you have suffered snakebite it will be a long and perhaps impossible journey!

Foremost in walking the trail is your body and the most important area is your feet. At times you may need to carry up to 2 weeks of food to be sure you are safe. If travelling alone this can make your pack up to 35kg in weight even with the most dramatic pruning of weight. All that has to bear down on your feet. If planning any long distance walks on the trail visit a chiropodist before you leave and get them to advise you on the way you walk, and ask them to provide you with some simple but very effective foam based inserts for your boots to help correct any imbalances in the way you walk and carry your total weight.

A common problem with long distance walkers in all terrains is cramp. Water is the solution. You can survive for days without food but lack of water will soon degrade your senses and your strength. Cramp is a very strong reminder of the onset of water deprivation, especially in your feet or your hands. Walking with a heavy pack for weeks on end will strengthen your legs, back and torso but your arms will suffer from loss of circulation from the pack cutting into your shoulders. This leads to cramp in the hands. Watch for it and drink more water.

The days on the trail can be long at times. Several days of 27km are not uncommon in some areas. Remember to rest and refresh frequently. The temptation to try to push on can be great at times but frequent rests and energy top ups with snacks will see you through to the camp spot. Plan to arrive with enough energy to pick a good spot, find a water source and eat well

before a good rest. In places on the trail you may need to carry water for more than a day. Put a small wine bladder in your pack to enable you to supplement your normal water carrying capacity – but remember every litre of water adds a kg to your pack weight.

The trail is isolated and it can be difficult to get supplies you normally expect in the larger towns and cities. Expect nothing in the bush! Even a toilet roll may be impossible to get and specialised accessories walkers use such as gas supplies will be impossible to get. Carry some lightweight climbing rope for emergency repairs to gear and shoes. Make everything you carry amenable to as many duties as possible. One tool can do many things in an emergency or as a routine task.

Just as horses suffer saddle sores and bikes will break so will your body tell you when you have not adjusted your pack or other gear properly. Listen to your body and try to understand what it is telling you about the need for adjustments. The great advantage that walkers have is their ability to stop at any time in any place and observe, consider and then move on without the need to consider animals or vehicles. Use this ability wisely as you can then see if you are heading into danger before it causes a problem.

Walking the trail is a unique experience It leads to balance in the walker in many aspects of themselves – physical, psychological, spiritual and social. Being happy in your own company, even when walking with others, will be something you will treasure forever.

To travel the BNT via any means, animal, mechanical or alone, required a blend of personal attributes that are rarely seen in modern society. To succeed you will need all types of toughness, agility and perseverance. Treat it all as a learning experience, no matter what your age or previous experiences – and remember that mobile phones do not work in most places on the trail and even if they do be sure you can charge them up.

Technology has moved on a bit since I did the trail but the reliance on yourself and keeping things simple is a key point if you plan a long distance trek. Technology will not pull you out of a river or fix a snake bite.