

Adventure out

Star Trek

As the rest of the world began winding down after a long day, a group of hikers put on their backpacks and ventured across the Darling Scarp, undeterred by the looming clouds, as the sun began to set over the Bibbulmun Track.

by Katie Stevens



Despite having ventured to the east side of the Darling Scarp many times, I am always astounded by how beautiful it is over the 'other side'. The bush out there seems almost unpretentious, in contrast to the majestic karri forests in the south. It's jam-packed with jarrah trees and the forest floor is lined with zamia palms and grass trees threatening to spike you at any second.

I am en route to a section of the Bibbulmun Track that crosses the Brookton Highway just south-east of the outer Perth suburb of Karragullen. *Star Trek* is my first ever Bibbulmun Track event and I am excited to get back out on track, even if it's only for an evening.

As I drive along the highway, hoping I have read the directions correctly, I am greeted with signs marking the event that have been set up by the forward-thinking event guides. As I drive in, I see people checking and re-checking their packs, tapping their pockets and performing the general body language sequence of "do I have everything I need?" I exit my car and perform the identical ritual.

As a group we gather to listen to the introductions from our guides about the walk. The *Star Trek* is a night walk, starting near sunset and finishing in the dark where we practice using night vision and take in the stunning star-filled sky away from the

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Hear more about walking the Bibbulmun Track

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Main Climbing up Abyssinia Rock.

Photo – Katie Stevens

Top Night sky over the Darling Scarp.

Photo – Roger Groom

Above Taking in the view.

Photo – Katie Stevens



light pollution of the city. Alas, it's very overcast with the threat of rain closing in fast. Our guide, Steve, apologises for his inability to control the weather, and despite the name of the event, it's obvious that we are unlikely to see a single star tonight!

OFF WE TREK

We head south along the Bibbulmun Track, in very humid conditions. The bush seems to be creaking all around us with the anticipation of rain. We stop a few times as our all-knowing guide feeds us little factoids of the flora and fauna around us. A few bushfires have ravaged this area over the years, with the most recent about three years ago. New growth has established as time has gone by.

The eerie call of red-tailed black cockatoos and the shriek of corellas can be heard overhead as they feast on the surrounding bush. Steve explains how we can spot the difference between the male and female red-tailed black cockatoos – the scarlet flashes on the tail feathers are the males, while the females have orange

and black bands and a duller plumage. I think to myself, amused, how the males are prettier in the animal world.

Continuing along the track we come to the side of a ridge providing sweeping views of the back of the scarp. Steve points out the various mounts and landmarks including an old fire lookout that, although we cannot see it with the human eye, we are assured is there. As we make our way downhill, we begin to approach Abyssinia Rock, a huge granite rock peaking at about a whopping 335 metres above sea level.

Dusk is beginning to set in as we climb the rock and take a break at the top joined by some friendly raindrops. All around me, organised hikers are beginning to pull out cheese, crackers, cold meats and wine. We stay here for a while as Steve tells us a wonderful story (which I'll keep a secret), looking up at the sky now blanketed in clouds, darkening quickly and showing no sign of letting a single star shine through. Wait, is that a star!? Nope, headlights from a vehicle on a distant hill.



NIGHT MOVES

After the break, lubricated with a little wine, the vibe is generally jovial. We make our way down the rock and split into two groups to test our night vision skills. The first group (who wish to use their head lamps) moves on while the rest of us stand in the dark, waiting for our eyes to start adjusting to the dark. Silence and the inability to see one another results in many humorous remarks and giggles. We begin to walk slowly, following the sound of each other's footsteps and voices, learning to make out various features of our gear through the dark. And it's dark, very dark, the moon isn't up, and the starlight isn't quite making it through the clouds. The unease about what may be beneath our feet starts to set in. Tread lightly, concentrate, listen.

Eventually we rejoin the other group and are relieved to be able to turn our head torches on and bathe in the safety of light. At this point, it's really raining so we head back to the cars with one final

stop to farewell everyone before reaching the carpark. As we reach the carpark the group scatters to their respective cars to make the journey home to a hot shower and bed no doubt!

Star Trek was fantastic; being in the bush in the cooling weather and rain experiencing a section of Perth rarely visited was wonderful. No, we didn't see stars, but there were plenty of other things to learn, experience and amuse us along the way, and there's nothing better than being in the bush.

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Top left A male red-tailed black cockatoo.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

Top right Cheers on Abyssinia Rock.

Above Waugal directional marker.

Right Off and away.
Photos – Katie Stevens

Do it yourself

Where is it? On the Bibbulmun Track, where it crosses Brookton Highway, about 21 kilometres south-east from Karragullen. From Perth, about 1-hour drive.

Facilities: Walk trail, parking.

Tours: Bibbulmun Track Foundation, visit www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au/walk-the-track/events-calendar/



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