

Commemorative walk on the Bibbulmun Track

Bushwalking novice and eternal optimist Ivy James tried her hand at walking nearly 70 kilometres from Brookton Highway to North Bannister along the Bibbulmun Track as part of its 25th anniversary celebrations. With minimal training and an open mind, Ivy embraced the experience and was enveloped by the track and the warmth of her fellow walkers.

by Ivy James






Discover more about the commemorative walk

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.



Try something new, they said—and try something new, I did.

I took my family by surprise when I told them I was swapping the pings and dings of my screens to hike the Bibbulmun Track over five days.

I had heard walking multi-day hiking was a test of mental and physical endurance with many experiencing spiritual breakthroughs along the way, so I was curious.

Given the Bibbulmun Track was marking its 25th anniversary this year, there was no better time to give it a go.

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Main Section Two walkers at the starting point on Brookton Highway.
Photo – Chris Lee

Above Alyi-wa Miya Campsite.
Photo – Steve Sertis

Left Ivy feeling strong.
Photo – Joe Keh

Inset Gilled mushroom (*Gymnopilus*).
Photo – Mike Wood/DBCA

Hiking and camping in the thick of winter in the Perth Hills...honestly how hard could it be?

In true Ivy fashion, I convinced myself I could totally 'wing it'. Little did I know what was in store for me.

OFF WE GO

As part of a group of five walkers, the task was to walk a section of the track from Brookton Highway to North Bannister. A total of nearly 70 kilometres, I would meet up with the official group of eleven who were completing the track from start to finish over the course of several weeks.

After signing a medical form, watching a briefing and ticking off a checklist provided by Bibbulmun Track Foundation's lead guide, Steve Sertis, I was ready to go.

Feeling nervous but excited, my partner dropped me off at Murdoch Train Station where I met 'Section Two' guide Mike Wood and fellow hikers sisters Julie and Di, and Jade.

Only twenty minutes into the five-day hike, I did not find carrying 15 kilograms of gear and food on my hips very pleasant.

Maybe I should have trained. I became acutely aware of my haversack biting into my shoulders and gnawing at my love handles as we walked towards the



Above Joe and Ivy at Mt Cuthbert.
Photo – Karen Gurry

Below Hikers enjoyed taking in diverse landscapes along the track.
Photo – Stewart Carter

Canning campsite. Chatting with my guardian angels Di and Julie helped me not think about the pain.

Oh boy, what have I got myself into! I was glad to have hiking poles on-hand to help distribute the weight.

Mastering the art of hand-eye-feet coordination while using my hiking poles took some getting used to. After a day or two of practice, it became rhythmic and effortless.

MEETING UP

After walking 25 kilometres the first two days, we met up with the end-to-end walkers at Alyi-wa Miya Campsite campsite, where we went from a group of five to 16 and hiked the remaining 44 kilometres together towards North Bannister.

Each day, we would wake at 6am, pack down, have breakfast and the countdown for take-off would begin. We'd



walk up to 16 kilometres each day before arriving at our next pit-stop to set up camp, only to do it all over again.

Of course, the section I chose involved hiking three peaks—Mount Cuthbert, Mount Vincent and Mount Cooke.

When I wasn't gasping for air or holding on to my hiking poles for dear life, I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know everyone and conversation flowed easily.

While on flat terrain, it was quite soothing to take in the dominant green,

brown and blue colors of the forest while inhaling fresh air.

I especially loved dinner time. The banter was delightful, and it was amusing to watch everyone barter snacks and discuss their dehydrated meals with such passion. Injuries, blisters, aches and pains were also attended to during this time.

It became apparent how much planning and preparation the end-to-end walkers had undertaken.



“When you’re out in the wilderness with only what you have on your back and the people you’re with, you learn to have each other’s backs. It’s all about cooperation, not competition.”



WHEN NATURE CALLS

Some nights, as the bitter cold wind and rain howled, whipped and lashed my tent, I directed fervent instructions to my bladder to hang tight and hold till the morning light. Luckily, I didn’t have to use the shovel at all.

Instead, I became acquainted with the long drops at camp and would look up

to find a strategically positioned poster detailing what to do in the event of a bushfire and headlined with a simple but effective key message: ‘Your safety is our concern but your responsibility’.

I felt grateful and safe being with two highly experienced guides.

Every evening, Steve would brief the group on the history of the campground we were at, where to next and the terrain we would encounter.

It gave me goosebumps to hear how bushfires had ravaged or left their mark on the campground or nearby bushland in the past.

Looking out at the luscious greenery, you’d never be able to tell a bushfire had come through. There is so much beauty in the recovery.

VISITOR IN THE NIGHT

In the bush, there’s a ‘Leave No Trace’ principle where you carry every single

piece of rubbish with you, which was starting to smell by the third day.

At the Mount Cooke campsite, I’d left my sealed bag of rubbish outside my tent and had an unexpected visitor.

There was plenty of rustling and shuffling. A boxing kangaroo perhaps? My imagination ran wild.

I didn’t dare unzip my tent to see for myself, so I made low growling noises like I was an angry bear. Thankfully, I had reception and was able to call Mike who was by the fireplace with the others.

He came to my rescue with a torchlight and reassured me it was probably just a quenda.

I was the talk of the camp.

A FULL HEART

I’m embarrassed to admit, I didn’t realise sleeping bags are graded.

After suffering for the first three nights despite layering on clothes, I came

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Main above Clear night sky, of WA’s southwest.

Photo – Frances Andrijich

Inset (left to right) Group photo, braving the rain. *Photo – Annie Smith; Southern brown bandicoot or quenda (Isodon fusciventer).*

Photo – Jiri Lochman; Break around the campfire. Photo – Mike Wood/DBCA

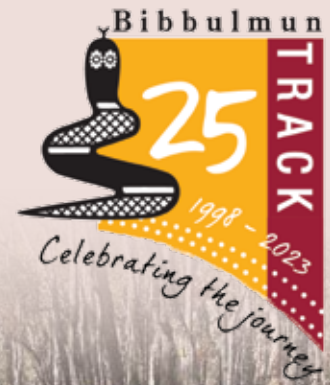


DO IT YOURSELF

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

Facilities: Walk trail, parking.

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



to learn the sleeping bag I had borrowed was graded +14 degrees, not -8 like the checklist had listed.

Red-faced even for a brown-skinned person, I finally told a few people about my troubles who immediately sprang into action.

That night, tears were shed as I lay in my tent, warm and protected by Sue's space blanket, Stewart's puffer jacket, Jade's comforting words, Terry's spare quilt and everyone's collective kindness.

When you're out in the wilderness with only what you have on your back and the people you're with, you learn to have each other's backs. It's all about cooperation, not competition. A key lesson I will carry with me out of the bush.

COMING HOME

Soon enough, we emerged out of the forest at North Bannister to find the next round of section walkers and the shuttle

bus that would take us back to Murdoch train station.

Having not showered for five days, I felt lucky and loved knowing my person was on the way as I waited in the 'kiss n ride' looking and no doubt smelling like a rakali.

When I got home, I had the best shower of my life.

Was it an intense experience? Yes. Would I do it again? For the stars, the serenity and for my soul—most definitely count me in!

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Clockwise (from top left) Camping. Photo – Karen Gurry; Abbey Road, Bibbulmun style. Photo – Stewart Carter; Mangles kangaroo paw (*Anigozanthos manglesii*). Photo – Andrew Brown/DBCA; Getting used to the hiking poles. Photo – Bibbulmun Track Foundation; Taking a break along the track. Photo – Karen Gurry

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