

# Photo Trekking

## Overland Track - Tasmania

Wilderness and nature shooter Michael Snedic outlines **how you can plan and undertake a bushwalk** and also come back with some great images.



**ABOVE** Waterfall, Douglas Creek, Tasmania. I had plenty of time to compose my shot and try various settings before deciding on this particular group of settings as the most suitable for the waterfall. A two-second shutter speed helped produce the 'milky' flowing effect of the water. Nikon D700, 150mm f/2.8 Sigma macro lens, 2 seconds @ f/22, ISO 160, tripod used, cable release, mirror-lock-up.

One of the great things about photography is that your camera is portable and you can take photos almost anywhere. Here I want to explain the best way to prepare for and execute a photo trek into the bush. Australia is a lucky country in many ways, not least of all because it has so much great bush terrain. It's fantastic to be able to get photographs of it, but hiking deep into the wilderness can be a real challenge. It is achievable though, if you plan and prepare for your trip properly. I describe a 'photo trek' as an expedition where you hike for a period of days or sometimes even a week, camp overnight at various spots, and take with you all the provisions you'll need. You can take photos along the way, as well as venturing out on shorter side trips from where you set up camp each night.

You might ask whether it's worth all that trouble and effort, when you can drive to a spot, take your pictures and leave, or even camp in one spot and take photos around the area in which you're based. These options are also feasible and certainly easier, but sometimes the best wilderness locations for photography can be difficult to access unless you hike and camp along the way. As well, the most photographed Australian natural 'icons' are usually those easiest to access. By planning a photo trek, you can be rewarded with great shots of locations and subjects which are seldom seen and photographed. Not only that, the actual 'journey' can be well worth the experience!

One photo trek I completed recently was a hike along the breathtakingly beautiful Overland Track in Tasmania. I started the



**LEFT** Mt Geryon sunset, Tasmania. I'd been photographing fungi with my macro lens, when I came across this scene. My instinct was to pick up my camera, choose my settings, compose my shot and fire off a few shots. This scene lasted only for a few minutes. Sometimes you have to move quickly. Nikon D700, 150mm f/2.8 Sigma macro lens, 1/8000s @ f/5.6, ISO 1000, hand-held.

**BELOW** Spectacular Barn Bluff. I saw it in the distance and instantly knew that there was a photo opportunity to be had. Once I was close to the two foreground boulders, I set my tripod low to the ground. Nikon D700, using a 16-35mm f/4 lens 1/125s @ f/14, ISO 200, tripod, cable release.





**ABOVE** Cradle Mountain, Tasmania. I was absolutely exhausted, having scrambled up a very steep ridge, with a heavy load on my back. You can imagine my relief when I finally reached the top of the ridge line to the lookout and saw this dramatic scene in front of me! My back pain and exhaustion were forgotten as I took my camera out of my backpack and took a few shots, hand-held. Nikon D700, using a 16-35mm f/4 lens, 1/250s @ f/16, ISO 800, hand-held.

walk at Cradle Mountain and finished it a week later at Lake St Clair. It was one of the greatest experiences of my life. Not only was I overwhelmed by the incredible natural beauty of the area and the wonderful people I met along the way, but I came back with a great selection of shots. Here I'll use my experience to outline the basics of how you can go about a similar expedition.

### Research & Preparation

Do your research thoroughly when choosing your destination. You'll need to consider the best time of the year to travel, and work out when your chosen region is at its most photogenic. The most important aspect when planning to spend a string of days in remote wilderness is safety. I highly recommend you travel with at least one other person. That

way, should an accident happen or should you get lost, you can help each other out. Some level of fitness is also required, since carrying a heavy weight on your back for many days, over varied types of terrain, can be quite exhausting. So plan a training program (start by simply walking over hilly terrain, then begin the same walk with a pack on your back) over a couple of months. Start slowly over shorter distances, and build up your fitness carefully each week. Stop if you strain yourself. A rest in the week before you depart is also not a bad idea. A set of walking poles is a great addition to any trek; they can help you in getting up and down hills. They also help stabilise you when you're walking over loose rocks and other debris.

Once you've decided upon a suitably photographic destination, there are Parks

and Wildlife permits to consider for whichever state you're planning to visit. Walks such as the Overland Track in Tasmania generally book out quickly, so it's essential to book a 'spot' and pay your permit fees well in advance. Some walks are best (or most safely) done only at certain times of the year, which can also limit the access of hikers. You may well need to plan your booking many months ahead. Consideration must also be given on how to get to the start of your trek.

Transport needs to be arranged to the start of the track, as well as at the end of the walk if it's not a circular route.

### Packing: Less Is Best

A very important aspect of planning your photo trek is working out what to take

## ☀ 10 TOP AUSTRALIAN WALKS - BY BRENT MCKEAN, EDITOR OF GREAT WALKS MAGAZINE

If you want to get the most out of a photographic expedition whilst also bushwalking try one of the following tracks which can get you back to nature.

### 1 The Great North Walk, NSW

*(Distance/time: 250km/10-14 days. Grade: moderate)* Running from Macquarie Place, Sydney to Bicentennial Park, Newcastle, the Great North Walk is a spectacular wilderness workout. There are many side tracks which link the track to populated areas along the trail. Highlights includes a huge variety of wildlife, and lush scenery. [www.thegreatnorthwalk.com](http://www.thegreatnorthwalk.com)

### 2 Great Ocean Walk, Vic

*(Distance/time: 104km/5-7 days. Grade: easy/moderate)* This walk traverses a wide variety of coastal landscapes with a diverse array of flora and fauna. It includes sweeping coastal vistas, tall timbers and temperate rainforest. You'll pass the remnants of some of Victoria's many dramatic shipwrecks and finish at the iconic Twelve Apostles. [www.greatoceanwalk.com.au](http://www.greatoceanwalk.com.au)

### 3 Bibbulmun Track, WA

*(Distance/time: 1000km/50 days. Grade: moderate/challenging)* One of Australia's longest walking trails, the Bibbulmun Track showcases the best of WA. People don't walk

the whole track in one go, but do some of the 50 sections. The track is almost all through state forest, national parks and other reserves, with only a few small sections over farmland and settled districts. [www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au](http://www.bibbulmuntrack.org.au)

### 4 Heysen Trail, SA

*(Distance/time: 1200km/60 days. Grade: moderate/challenging)* The Heysen Trail traverses many of the SA's changing landscapes, from Cape Jervis on the south coast of the Fleurieu Peninsula, to Parachilna Gorge in the Flinders Ranges. Walking the entire trail takes a couple of months, but once again it can be done in small sections. [www.heysentrail.asn.au](http://www.heysentrail.asn.au)

### 5 Fraser Island Great Walk, Qld

*(Distance/time: 90km/6-8 days. Grade: easy/moderate)* Explore the world's largest sand island on foot and discover ever-changing landscapes, stunning scenery and fascinating natural and cultural heritage. You'll see eucalyptus woodland, mangrove forests, and great coastal scenery. [www.derm.qld.gov.au](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au)

### 6 Gold Coast Hinterland Great Walk, Qld

*(Distance/time: 55km/3 days. Grade: moderate)* This beautiful trail links the

species-rich, Gondwana rainforests of the Australian World Heritage Area of Lamington and Springbrook plateaus via the scenic Numinbah Valley. One highlight is the volcanic landscape of the Tweed Volcano, still being eroded by plummeting waterfalls. [www.derm.qld.gov.au](http://www.derm.qld.gov.au)

### 7 Cape to Cape Track, WA

*(Distance/time: 135km/5-7 days. Grade: easy)* This walk mostly follows the coast, alternating spectacular sweeping cliff-top views with stretches of pristine beach. There are several inland loops however, which take in lovely sheltered woodland sections as well as the magnificent Boranup karri forest. [www.capetocapetrack.com.au](http://www.capetocapetrack.com.au)

### 8 Larapinta Trail, NT

*(Distance/time: 223km/12-14 days. Grade: moderate)* The Larapinta Trail crosses the backbone of the ancient West MacDonnell Ranges. Beginning at the old Alice Springs Telegraph Station, the track meanders through many gaps and sheltered gorges, climbing steeply over the rugged ranges. [www.larapintatrail.com](http://www.larapintatrail.com)

### 9 The Coastal Walk, Royal National Park, south of Sydney, NSW

*(Distance/time: 26km/2 days. Grade: easy)* Australia's oldest national park varies from coastal cliffs littered with beaches and small inlets to an ancient high plateau broken by deep river valleys. The walk follows the sandstone cliff line and offers panoramic views over the Pacific. In winter and spring the place is literally alive with wildflowers. [www.environment.nsw.gov.au](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au)

### 10 National Pass, Blue Mountains, New South Wales

*(5km/3hr. Degree: easy/moderate)* Though not actually a multi-day walk, this trail showcases the best of the iconic Blue Mountains. After years of neglect the National Pass was recently restored, earning the architects a National Trust award for heritage conservation. Surrounded by waterfalls, this walk offers great views of the Jamison Valley for photographers. [www.nationalpass.com.au](http://www.nationalpass.com.au)



IMAGE SUPPLIED BY BRENT MCKEAN

☀ **OVERLAND TRACK INFO**



The author on the trail.

The Overland Track extends over 65km and demands a reasonably high level of fitness. Don't attempt it without some hiking preparation beforehand. At a normal pace it will take around five nights and six days. With the longer hours of daylight between December and April, this is the best time of year to walk the track. Although the weather is always highly variable (from sleet and snow to sunshine) these months generally offer milder conditions. Bookings are required for each walking season (Nov 1 to April 30), and during this period walkers are required to travel from north to south (Cradle Mountain to Lake St. Clair) and must pay a fee. If you travel outside this period the fee doesn't apply. The park service advises that tents MUST be carried. This offers hikers some independence and the ability to stop if the weather closes in or other issues (fatigue or injury) arise. Camp fires aren't permitted in the park. Hikers must carry fuel stoves because the heaters in the huts are not suitable for cooking. However you should note that the airlines and ferry service do not allow flammable items like stove fuel or petrol on board. Check with your travel service for details.

For more details contact the **Parks and Wildlife Service of Tasmania** at Cradle Mountain, 4057 Cradle Mountain Rd, Cradle Mountain, Tas, 7310, ph: (03) 6492 1110 or email: [cradle@parks.tas.gov.au](mailto:cradle@parks.tas.gov.au) or Lake St.Clair NP, Derwent Bridge, Tas, 7140, ph: (03) 6289 1172.

and what to leave behind, especially if you're out in the wilderness for a week or more and you have to carry everything on your back. We all enjoy the comforts of home and it's tempting to take everything including the 'kitchen sink'. But it's just as important to understand you must take only the minimal gear needed for your survival and comfort, otherwise the excessive weight will eventually wear you out and ruin your experience. If you're going to buy camping gear, I suggest going to a specialist camping store where the staff are usually highly experienced in supplying gear for overnight treks. I understand most people have a budget, but paying a bit more for quality gear is well worth it and a great long-term investment. Not only will durable, light-weight equipment be more comfortable in the field, it will generally keep you drier and warmer. For areas such as Tasmania, where you can experience every "season" within a short time – and at any time of the year – you'll be glad you bought quality gear!

Apart from the obligatory tent, sleeping bag and base (such as a Thermarest), one of the most important purchases you'll make is the pack you'll carry all of your gear in. It should be comfortable from the very start and also totally waterproof. I suggest buying a pack rain cover; it's crucial your bedding and clothes remain dry. If you're soaked to the skin after a day's walking in rain, at least you'll have some dry clothes to change into when you pitch your tent. It doesn't take long for hypothermia to set in if you stay cold and wet, especially when temperatures

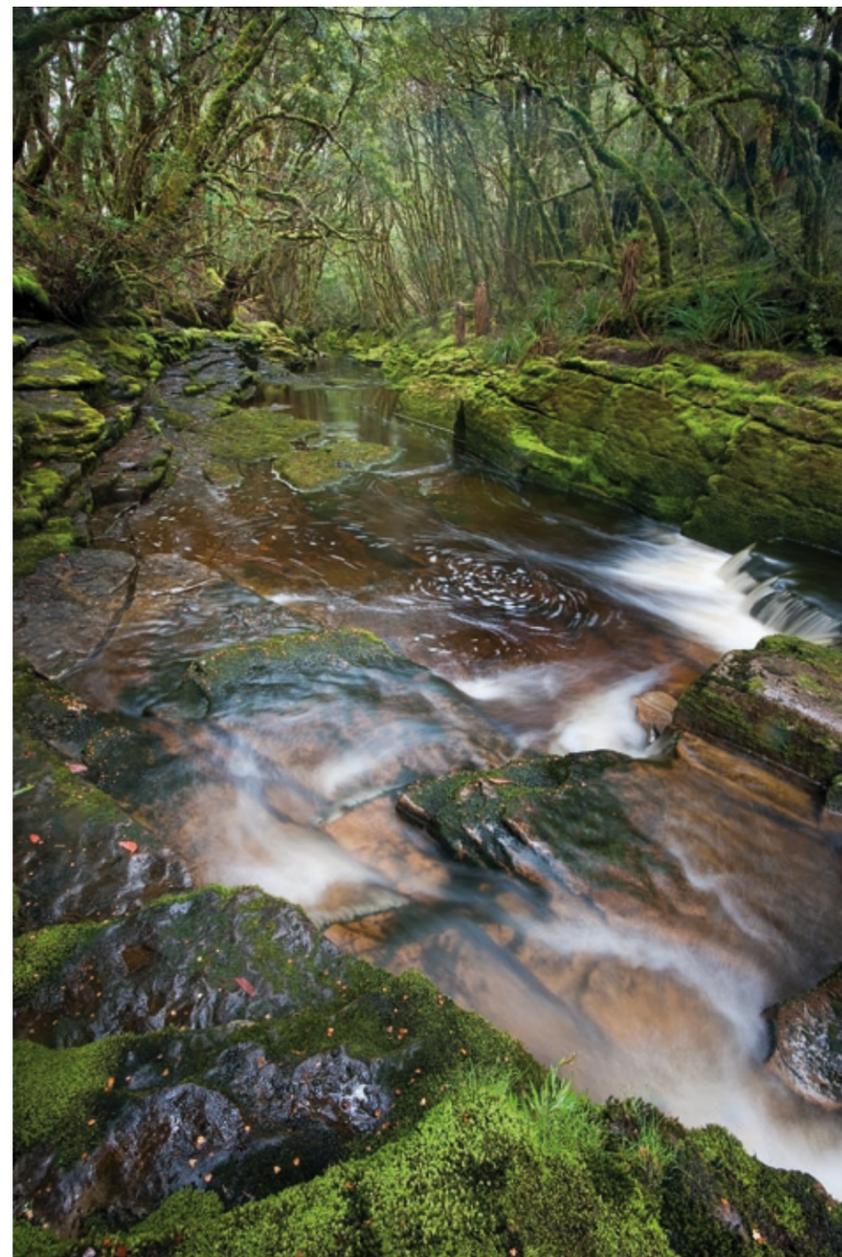
can fall below freezing in some locations. Wear lots of layers, rather than one or two pieces of thick clothing, as this will allow you to keep warm and it will draw perspiration away from your body.

Many websites offer you detailed, step-by-step instructions on what to take with you. Alternatively, you can talk to your local camping store staff for professional advice. The essential requirements include a stove, fuel, cutlery and crockery, an appropriate (compact) first-aid kit, wet-weather gear, toiletries and, of course, lightweight, nutritious and easily cooked food which will last for the length of your trip. I recommend separating and weighing each of your three main meals and putting those portions into zip-lock plastic bags. Label the bags, with each meal and the day written on the bags with a felt pen. Bring lots of chocolate and muesli bars. Another essential you'll need is plenty of drinking water. Walks such as the Overland Track have springs and creeks along the way, but some type of purification tablet will be required. Other treks, like the Larapinta Trail west of Alice Springs, have much less drinking water available and thus need a lot more planning in this respect. Each specific walk you undertake requires careful consideration of both your water and food needs to match the conditions you'll most likely encounter.

**Organise A Light Kit**

After fine-tuning the necessities, decide on your photo equipment. I regularly take all of my lenses, tripod and other accessories when going on day trips, because I often don't know what photo opportunities nature will throw up on the day. On a multi-day trek, however, it simply isn't possible to take your usual kit along. Apart from the room it takes up, the weight of your full kit really becomes an issue. There comes a point where you simply can't reduce your essential items. With your camping gear, food, clothes and water already weighing so much, you must keep your photographic kit to an absolute minimum.

If you mainly take landscape images, I would only take one wide-angled zoom lens. If you're mainly into macro photography, take one macro lens and concentrate on this subject. If you're a photographer who doesn't specialise in particular subjects, a medium-



length zoom with macro capabilities and a wide-angle lens will work. There may be times where you'll wish you had all your lenses, but this just isn't feasible when you're carrying such a large load on your back. Once you've chosen your preferred lens or lenses, you'll also need a single camera body and a light-weight tripod such as a carbon fibre or mag fibre version, or even one of those small, flexible units (the legs of which can wrap around branches) if your camera set-up is lightweight. I appreciate that normally a spare SLR body is important when you're shooting in the field, but the excessive weight simply precludes this option when you're trekking.

**Accessory & Backpacks**

When you look at any accessories, choose what you'd normally need for a day's photography in the field and then reduce that by half! It's amazing that when you look at each individual item and ask yourself "do I really need this?" the answer can be "no" in many cases. Essential items include taking enough memory cards to last the trip, or a small, portable storage device on to which you can download your photos. I recommend two or three fully charged batteries (depending on the length of the walk), because almost certainly there won't be any power points to charge your batteries along the way! There are solar-



**ABOVE** I noticed this patch of lichen as I was walking so I stopped to shoot its amazing texture. Nikon D700, 150mm f/2.8 Sigma macro lens, 1/800s @ f/4, ISO 2000, hand-held.

**LEFT** Douglas Creek, Tasmania. At first light I headed straight for this creek. The clouds on this day helped 'diffuse' the light on the scene beautifully, creating soft, even lighting. Nikon D700, 16-35mm f/4 lens, 1.3s @ f/22, ISO 200, tripod, cable release, mirror-lock-up.

powered battery chargers on the market, but depending on the weather conditions, you might not get enough sun to power these up. Something else which is often overlooked by photographers going on multi-day treks, is what to carry your camera, lens and accessories in after you've pitched your tent and are about to venture out for more photos. I suggest buying a light-weight pack which folds up easily and can be put into your larger pack when it's not in use. That way, you can leave your main camping gear at your campsite and go on shorter trips using that smaller pack.

As well as taking lots of great photos in areas which are usually inaccessible on day trips, photo-trekking is a great way to get fit and to get closer to nature. Enjoy your journey... \*

*Michael Snedic is a professional nature photographer, writer and tutor. He's co-owner of Trekabout Photography Workshops, and conducts photography workshops across Australia - [www.trekaboutphotography.com](http://www.trekaboutphotography.com) For more information visit [www.michaelsnedic.com](http://www.michaelsnedic.com)*