

Some comments relating to the Cape to Cape Track (from a first time walkers perspective), April 2003

- We (self aged 50 with my 18 and 12 year old sons) travelled the track, North to South, during the Easter period, April 2003
- The walk took seven days (five full days and two part days) and we camped each night. The longest distance covered in a day was 26 km on days 3 & 5. The shortest was 6 km on the first afternoon.
- We were first time hikers and did nothing special in the way of physical preparation. Neither the pace nor the overall distance travelled presented any problems other than a couple of minor blisters.
- We planned the trip as an inexpensive school holiday break and we acquired much of the equipment from local garage sales and Op shops. I was surprised at the price differences in the Perth outdoor stores so it is worth shopping around. Pre Easter sales offered significant reductions on selected clothing and equipment.
- Our primary guide was “The Cape to Cape Track Guidebook” by Jane Scott, which was excellent. Andrew Priest’s more subjective Aushiker Trail Notes provided a very practical, accurate and important supplement.
- We drove from Perth to Dunsborough, leaving the car in the public car park between the Visitors Information Centre and the main shopping centre. We taxied between the two lighthouses and then returned on the very comfortable Westrail 3.05pm bus from Augusta seven days later. This dropped us at the Visitors Information Centre, about 20 metres from the car.
- We travelled as lightly as possible and took a poly tarp to use as a fly/ ground sheet, rather than a tent. This worked well for us, though mosquitoes were a minor irritation on a couple of nights (*TIP - don’t forget the “Rid”*). We used our hiking sticks (which do make the going easier) as tent poles which gave greater flexibility in the choice of camp sites as suitable trees were scarce.
- When we returned I weighed my pack, which was 8 kilos (excluding water and food), so I guess I had a load of about 12 kilos. Due to the amount of beach walking any heavier must really detract from the enjoyment of the walk (*TIP – check the weight of your pack before leaving. If you don’t have scales at home, visit your local Veterinary Surgery and ask to use theirs*). I was surprised at the amount of gear carried by other hikers and recommend all first timers to really carefully consider what you take and the weight involved.
- On the issue of equipment, the boys wore their everyday sandshoes and these were fine. I started out in a pair of old leather boots that I had stored in the bottom of a trunk for years, but these literally fell to pieces on Kilcamup Beach. By great

good luck I had decided at the last minute to pack some old boat shoes due to concerns about the sand. Following the death of these boots (and prompted by the logistical problems of getting anything else along the way), I wore these for the remainder of the walk. Whilst not recommending this, they served their purpose well. They were more comfortable than heavy boots and took me the second half of the trip (three days & 70 kilometres) without any problems.

- We had originally intended staying at the CALM campsites but found that we did not arrive at convenient time to stop (in part because we started off a couple of hours later than planned on Day 1). Whilst the picnic tables were a true luxury and the guarantee of water most important, the locations leave a lot to be desired. With the exception of Deepdene, you would not give them a second glance if you were looking for a day trip picnic spot. This is a great shame when there are so many great potential locations. On all but one night we camped rough and low key along the trail, generally close to the beach.
- The availability of water was by far our biggest issue and the most important topic discussed by other hikers. The weather was ideal as it was not particularly hot, however I had initially underestimated our requirements. We started out with four litres between us, but quickly increased this to eight litres (*TIP - a number of smaller containers are easier to pack and to carry and 600ml plastic Coke bottles proved to be ideal for us*). This quantity gave us the freedom to camp where we wanted. We filled both ourselves and our bottles at every opportunity, constantly trying to balance the issue of weight versus requirements. We drank freely from all of the springs and running creeks that we passed (a trip highlight for my younger son) without using any purification and suffered no ill effects (again I am not recommending this, purely recording it). I estimate we consumed about four litres each per day. If you are travelling in a large group, or have the time and logistic ability, it would be worth considering establishing water drops along the way to remove the uncertainty of availability and the burden of carrying it.
- I found the track to be well marked and we didn't lose it for more than twenty or thirty meters at some of the potentially more obscure places. The footprints of those who preceded us were helpful on more than one occasion. A couple of northbound hikers mentioned that they felt that the trail was more difficult to follow in this direction, with signs easier to miss and the Guidebook written primarily with a north to south focus.
- The off track campsites are not sign posted and some could be easily missed. Deepdene is potentially the most difficult to find. Travelling south, the exit is the third dune blow out you pass (as per the Cape to Cape Guidebook notes), however we still ventured up all three, thus wasting time and energy. This access blowout is considerably larger than the first two and is also differentiated by the remnants of a fence line running across the dune entry on the southern side.

- I had expected that there would be a large number of people on the track over the Easter long weekend, but this was not the case. We only encountered seven or eight other individuals or groups during the week, plus a few day trekkers on the northern sector.
- Easter was a good time to walk as the weather had cooled quite a bit and rain was not a real problem (a couple of light sprinkles on two mornings and then a down pour a half an hour from the end). It is worth considering the time of sun rise and sunset when planning your trip. In April this was about 6am and 6pm – any less daylight autumn would have been a problem due to reduced hiking time and overly long nights. On one of our early stops we were in our sleeping bags by 7.30pm – I woke during the night thinking that it must soon be dawn to realize that it was only 9.30pm (by the way, the ground does get a lot harder as you get older and sleeping mats are extraordinarily thin compared with the try out on the lounge room floor).
- We walked nearly all of the beaches bare footed, which was significantly easier than wearing shoes. There is a lot of soft sand and this can be slow, hard going (*TIP - make sure that you secure footwear firmly to you pack. I had to backtrack along Deepdene Beach to retrieve a lost shoe from a boy who we agreed would remain nameless*). We talked to a couple of heavily laden northbound girls who had declined a number of lifts along some of the long southern beaches by 4WD'ers. If this happens, it would be worth asking them to drop your packs at the far end of the beach. The purity of walking is not diminished by not carrying them and it is unlikely that anybody will steal a pile of smelly clothes and packets of instant noodles.
- Avoid carrying too much food. Basic items can be replenished or supplemented at Yallingup, Gracetown, Prevelly and Hamelin Bay. Arriving at Prevelly, we stored our packs for a couple of hours with the canoe hire operator (located at the river mouth car park amenity block), whilst we went into town. Two meal highlights were a big, mid morning breakfast fry up of bacon and egg using the coin operated BBQ opposite the Hamelin Bay Caravan Park store, and some tremendous fish and chips in Augusta at the shop next to the Visitors Info Centre.
- When we reached the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse we purchased a “Cape to Cape End-to-End” certificate from the souvenir shop. This proved to be a great memento of the trip, now proudly displayed on a bedroom wall. We also took a small disposable camera which was light to carry and effective for our needs.
- Overall, the trek was a great experience for all of us and I highly recommend it. The scenery must include some of the best coastal views in Australia and there are enough challenges to provide a real sense of accomplishment without doing yourself any damage. My sons really enjoyed it and there is no doubt that the achievement gave them both a big character and confidence top up.

Prepared by Peter Gee @ prgee@modnet.com.au