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Feature Article

The Spirit is in the Sole

Tasmania's Overland Track

By [Kari Lundgren](#)



'It's really *spiritual*,' he said.

I was standing in an organic food store in Hobart, Tasmania, talking to a teenage hippie. I was trying to find a commercial bushwalking company, and he offered to draw me a map to their office on the back of a packet of organic mustard seeds.

I had visions of a week spent eating macrobiotic prunes and singing *Kumbaya* around a campfire. It just wasn't my style. But I had come too far and was too keen on hiking the Overland Track to say no.



For over 75 years, the Overland Track's pristine landscapes, inquisitive wildlife and challenging - but very achievable - 40 miles have been attracting hikers to Tasmania from across the globe. Today, with almost 10,000 visitors each year, the track is an Australian icon, a rite of passage for the serious Aussie bushwalker and a must-do for any

outsider who wants to hike in the region.

A week later, standing in the rain, knee-deep in mud and bent double under the weight of my pack, I was having second thoughts. It was our third day on the track and the morning's gentle drizzle had become a relentless downpour. The carefully laid boardwalk, so pleasantly dry and reliable the day before, was now invisible under several inches of water.

Ahead of me, our Tasmanian guide gazed cheerfully into the rainforest,

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unfazed by the weather. He had perhaps spotted a grove of tea trees or a palm-like *pandani*, and the eager look on his face suggested he wanted to let me in on his discovery.

'How far is it from here, do you think?' another hiker asked. Neither of us expected a straight answer. We had learned on our first day that our guide had an elastic sense of time and distance.

Our guide looked up with a grin. He wasn't going to be caught out. 'We'll get there when we get there,' he said and skipped off down the track, ponytail bobbing.

An hour later found us warm and dry, fatigue forgotten, with our socks dangling cheerfully above the Pelion Hut's stove. The spicy, honey-sweet smell of chai hung pleasantly in the air.

It had taken a leisurely three days to reach Pelion Hut from our starting point at the northernmost end of the Overland Track. Travelling four to six miles each day, we had stopped for long lunches beside hidden waterfalls, crossed grey-gold stretches of button grass moorland and paused to exclaim over the flaming reddish orange of a waratah in full bloom. In the evenings, we camped or bunked, and stayed up late into the night playing raucous games of dice or listening to the midnight cackling of Tasmanian devils.



As is often the case in Tasmania (or Tassie to the locals) we were treated to both gloriously clear skies and blinding rain, sometimes in the same day. We became familiar with the Tasmanians themselves - their gregarious, self-mocking sense of humour, their all-consuming passion for the outdoors and bushwalking.

Solvitur ambulando, Latin for 'it is solved by walking', could have been coined by a Tasmanian.

Technically, you only need seven hours and twenty-five minutes to complete the Overland Track. That's the record. But as we turned off the main trail towards Pine Valley Hut, a side-trip that adds two days to what is normally a six-day walk, I sighed with relief over the extra time. That morning we had stood in the mist of two secluded waterfalls and walked through rainforest bright with sunshine. After that, not even a fellow hiker who had developed a painful selection of blisters was interested in returning to civilisation.

Later that evening, I found myself perched high on a giant, square slab of dolerite rock with what seemed like the whole of Tasmania spread out at my feet. To my right lay the Labyrinth, a shadowy moorland dotted with glacial lakes. To my left was the glassy expanse of our final destination, Lake St Claire, a mere half-day's walk away. The wind whipped a silvery scrap of cloud across the bluff where I was sitting. I turned to see our Tassie guide waving me over for a photo.

My hippie friend in Hobart had been right after all, I thought. It had taken me just 40 miles to realise that, in Tassie, 'it's really spiritual' means, 'it's a bloody good walk, mate'.

Kari Lundgren



The views, creatures, and quirks of the Overland Track drove Kari back into the bush for several more expeditions during her visit to Tasmania, a two-week visit that stretched into two months. She's just finished writing up Norwegian highlights for Lonely



Planet's Europe Book, and will soon be using the long hours of summer sunshine to explore her country's capitol Oslo for the Norway guide.

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