

WORDS AND PHOTOS\_ DAWN GREEN

Like father, like daughter: two nature enthusiasts savouring an outing in the bush, Walpole, WA



# Babes in the woods

Think bushwalking with babies is too difficult? It doesn't have to be. And you'll both benefit from the experience.

**Bushwalking has always** served as a solid rock in the crazy swirl of life for my husband and I – in fact, it formed the foundation of our relationship back 13 years ago when we first started dating. A month of tackling long distance walks plus hitchhiking all over New Zealand, combined with a shared love for outdoor adventure, sealed the deal for us.

However, our lives changed dramatically when our little munchkin, Jarrah, arrived on the scene in 2013. We questioned firstly whether we would ever muster up the time or energy to take our daughter bushwalking and secondly, we wondered how our walks would change. Did they change? Well yes, they have, but in some pleasantly startling ways.

It's true, bushwalking with a baby is inevitably an entirely different experience to trekking with adults, with some unexpected bonuses plus a whole heap of prep time required. But it rings true to us that the benefits of nature time with bub greatly outweigh the challenges and as we soon learned, being prepared is the key to a positive time for all.

As for the recommended length of walks with babies, I would suggest taking 'baby steps' when starting out. In any case, a bushwalk with a baby is not about clocking in the kilometres – it's more about discovering little nature moments along the way. While only on the planet for a month, our daughter was already being carted around in her baby carrier for short walks every evening to settle her. Despite living in an urban environment, we had a special block of bush land through which we wandered for some quality time in nature. It was always a lively, happy time and in fact, it was in amongst that little paradise of peppermint trees that she uttered her first laugh, to our great delight.

When we moved south of Perth, we discovered the Peel region offered up a smorgasbord of bushwalking opportunities. Here we stretched out our walks for longer distances (up to 4-5 km) and relished exploratory strolls where kangaroos, cockatoos and pelicans were frequently spotted. Jarrah sat still on my back as we paused to soak up the antics of superb fairy-wrens (*Malurus cyaneus*) flitting around the bush, a flash of vivid blue dotting here and there, and she peered over my shoulder to watch a southern brown bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus*) rustling through the leaves not far off the track, oblivious to our presence.



Reaching out to get in touch with nature – Jarrah is enchanted by colourful wildflowers, Dwellingup, WA.  
BELOW: Simon and Jarrah tackle the ladder section with ease, Mt Frankland, WA.


### Taking the baby steps

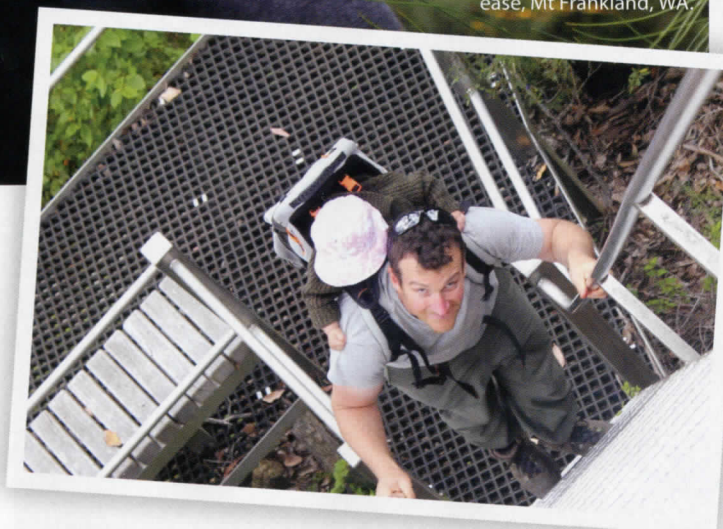
As my 40th birthday reared its head in December 2014, I instantly knew the most fitting way to celebrate this milestone – with a walking holiday in the south of WA. What ensued was a week of pure adventure and blissful nature time. It was fascinating to re-visit this remarkable place with a one-year-old in tow – gone were the lazy sleep-in mornings but instead we were blessed to experience nature through the eyes of a child, as we climbed Mt Frankland, wandered amongst the tingle trees and cruised on coastal walks.

During this trip we discovered the importance of preparing ahead for nap-times, and often Jarrah would sleep in the car on the drive to the trail head. It took some juggling of our schedule but it worked a treat, otherwise there were times when she simply nodded off while in the carrier, which was fine too. If that's the case, just make sure you have a small pillow on which baby can lay their head as they snooze to the rhythm of your walking.

And, as we learned, be prepared for all weather conditions when walking. One brisk morning at Cheynes Beach, we set out on a sandy track wearing beanies and shivering, yet after an hour things heated up considerably and we found ourselves shedding layers and sweating.

So just because I adore bushwalking, will my child feel the same way? Chances are they will, especially if they have a wealth of positive experiences at a young age to draw upon. So make walks fun – collect leaves and gum nuts along the way, stop close to a tree so baby can reach out and touch the bark, and marvel at the small things. Take note and practice bird calls as you walk and investigate fascinating bugs. Listen to the pounding of the ocean waves and search for sea shells. The possibilities are endless.

It's so true – nothing beats having your baby on your back, up close and personal and right there with you as you experience the magic of the bush together. If that's not bonding, then I don't know what is. 



### NEED TO KNOW

#### What to bring on a baby bushwalk

Here's a checklist of the essentials to help ensure a smile-filled nature walk:

- **Baby carrier** – use one that is sized properly to your baby and that fits you well. A sore back makes for an uncomfortable walk.
- **Small nappy change kit** – inevitably nappies need to be changed, so be prepared.
- **Toy** – it's true, sometimes the scenery isn't enough, so it's wise to bring along a favourite toy such as a small stuffy to help keep your baby occupied.
- **Snacks** – depending on age, snacks such as fruit, are key to keeping babies happy on the trail.
- **Water, sunscreen, mozzie spray, hats** – for you and baby. Don't forget your needs as well.
- **Layers** – bring that jumper for baby just in case the wind picks up or be prepared with a lighter layer if the sun gets hotter quicker than you thought.
- **Pillow** – have a small pillow or blanket (muslin wraps work great) on hand in case your baby's head starts to nod to the lulling rhythm of walking.

When planning your bushwalk remember to factor in lots of breaks, for nappy changes, snacks and play-time.