

Lavender Federation Trail

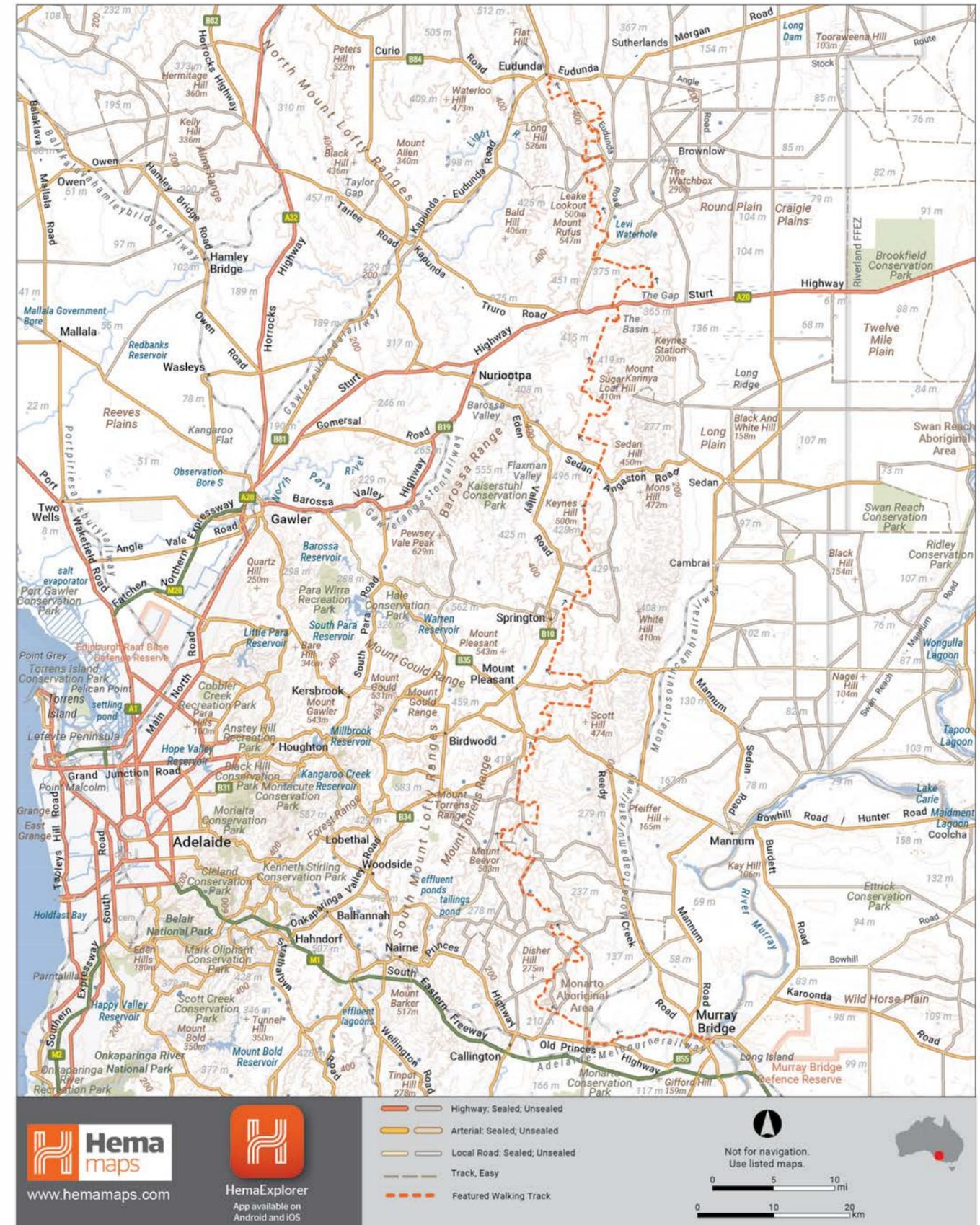
Michelle Ryan shares her recent experiences of rural South Australia while walking the Lavender Federation Trail

"I'm walking the Lavender Federation Trail", I would answer when asked what my next big walk would be. No one had heard of this trail – to be honest nor had I and I've been walking in Australia for quite some time now. I came across this trail in early 2015 when looking for a new adventure to finish off the hiking season. I had a great year, with my husband and I just recently returned from hiking 950 kilometres along the Via Francigena in Italy and while laid up in bed with the flu, the planning had begun.

The Lavender Federation Trail is a 212-kilometre hiking trail that starts on the beautiful banks of the Murray River, in Murray Bridge, South Australia. It meanders its way north through some very impressive countryside ending (at the time I walked it) in Eudunda, though progress was being made to extend this route further north to the charming town of Clare. You will walk through fields of canola, up rocky outcrops, stroll the vineyards of the Barossa Valley, share a paddock

or two with the sheep, cows and kangaroos and be serenaded by very noisy cockatoos. This trail is named in the honour of the late 'Mr. Bushwalking', Terry Lavender, the architect of the route and a man who is also remembered for his part in the creation of the famous Heysen Trail. On the 17th of April 2016, the next 31-kilometre section opened, taking the walker through to Webb Gap, where the Lavender Trail meets the Heysen Trail for the first time.

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Photos: xxxx



ACCOMMODATION

On research I found that no one had ever walked this route solo or end-to-end unaided before. Usually people would just walk sections at a time, but I wanted to knock it off in one go. It took a lot of emails, phone calls and research, but I finally worked it out, at times I was to walk a little further off track to find a place to stay, but it was well worth the added effort.

While planning, I found the locals incredibly easy to work with, having offers to stay with private residences as well as B&Bs that were all willing to keep me fed. By the end of the walk, and as a result of meeting the wonderful people who accommodated me, it is now possible for future walkers to go end-to-end by getting picked up from the trail and dropped back on the trail the next day.

Planning accommodation is essential, as camping is strictly not allowed at any point along the way. This may deter some potential walkers, but for anyone seeking a more European-style trail hiking experience, the Lavender Federation Trail is a must.

The following is a list of potential options for accommodation:

- Rabbiter's Hut. Contact: Bill and Annette, www.rabbitshut.com.au, info@rabbitshut.com.au
- Pennys Rd B&B. Contact: Gillian, www.pennysroad.com.au, hallsmith@ozemail.com.au
- Weighbridge Motel. Contact: Michael and Sandra, weighbridgemotel@hotmail.com.au
- Footeside Farm. Contact: Linda and Peter, www.footesidefarm.com.au, info@footesidefarm.com
- Light Hotel Eudunda. Contact: Dawn and David, davidanddawn@lighthotel.net.au

MAPS

Map packs come in four sections at the moment and are currently available for purchase from the following outlets:

- Murray Bridge Visitor Centre, (08) 8539 1142
- Friends of the Heysen Trail, www.heysentrail.asn.au
- Lavender Federation Trail Community, www.lavenderfederationtrail.org.au

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This beautiful walk would not be possible without the hard work and dedication of the LavenderFederationTrailCommunity. Anyone planning to take on this trail is strongly advised to contact them well in advance to ensure the best experience possible.

THE WALK

I left Murray Bridge to follow old, disused train lines while delighting in the crisp morning air. Being a rural setting, there's a mix of native and introduced birdsong while rabbits scurry across the tracks in total confusion. A grey kangaroo jumps out and pauses for a moment to look at me, then off he went. I also spied a kingfisher with his morning catch that he is slapping against the branch. What a fantastic start to the day. My first day's walk was 29 kilometres through some wetlands, with a huge variety of water birds, then it was a stroll through the stunning Rocky Gully Reserve among mallee trees and rocky outcrops. After a short rest I was back on track when I saw something one would not quite expect to see out in the Australian countryside: some very

long necks reaching up to the tree tops. Giraffes! No I didn't have sunstroke; I was passing the Monarto Zoo, one of the largest open-range zoos in the world.

It was a long day and I felt relieved to arrive at my accommodation at the Rabbiters Hut. On arriving, Bill and Annette left a plate of local cheeses and a cold beer followed by the best lasagne. The hut is a restored rural cottage sitting amongst the paddocks in peaceful surroundings.

Day Two was quite a diverse day of walking. I had 30 kilometres ahead of me and found myself walking on country roads among fields of bright, golden canola, paddocks filled with sheep and cows. I continued through some marshland, up a mountain, down the mountain and finishing as the final light disappeared. Not only was the terrain diverse, so was the fauna I saw. I nearly trod on two blue tongue lizards, I was swooped by magpies and later scared a large fox who was probably hunting the rabbits I had seen along the route. I also had to contend with cattle that refused to move from the path. There was a paddock of llamas and a little black pug who thought he was a much larger dog. The highlight of my day was the albino kangaroo boasting an incredibly heavy pouch – a rare sight indeed. This brilliant day finished off by a free juice from a lovely farmer and an amazing lamb curry that Annette had waiting for me back at the (aptly named, it seems) Rabbiters Hut. I have to thank Bill and Annette for going out of their way to transport me to and from the trail on this section of the walk, and for having me stay with them for two nights. Day Three offered a mere 20 kilometres with a lot fewer hills, more rolling paddocks, though not as quiet and peaceful as one would imagine. The cockatoos were going

crazy, which meant rain was on the way. The scenery was so pretty it was like walking through a painting; so much so I just had to stop and relax in a field by a creek and take it all in.

Day Four, I had 27 kilometres to walk and I felt good. I had an amazing encounter with a mob of kangaroos that decided to come charging towards me. It felt like an ambush as they charged, only to then come to a sudden halt before turning and jumping over the fence.

My day ended pleasantly when I walked into the very pretty historical town of Springton. There was a lovely looking church, a general store and a pub. It was great to stock up on supplies and then have a beer.

Springton has some interesting German history and the most famous part is the large Herbig Tree. A German immigrant named Federick Herbig lived in this hollowed out Red Gum with his young wife Caroline, where they had the first two of their sixteen children. I had the pleasure of staying at the homestead that they later built and lived in. A real treat.

Day Five started out cold, the scenery was again beautiful and there wasn't a huge walk ahead; only around 23 kilometres along the trail. When there was about five kilometres left to go, the sky grew extremely dark. I stopped to take a photo of a hill with a lone tree on top and dark moody clouds behind and suddenly the wind picked up, the air turned bitterly cold and icy rain pelted down hard and fast, soon turning into hailstones. The wind pushed me sideways and the rain stung my face as it showered down. Finally, I made it to my night's stay and the weather decided to settle down, the cockatoos' warnings were right. I stayed at Penny's B&B, where there was an old-fashioned wrought-iron bath with a wood fire burning next to it and a delicious chicken risotto awaiting me. After yesterday's storm I had woken to a beautiful sunrise with morning mist hugging

the paddock, looks like day six was to be a good one! After having a wonderful bath the night before, I was ready to tackle the 26 kilometres ahead of me. I had shared my lunch break with a lizard I named Bob, he was a bobtail lizard who really didn't care too



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Photos: xxxx

other side to some fabulous views. This is a section of the trail you could spend hours exploring or just sitting and watching the scenery but I still had over 20 kilometres to walk, so I reluctantly tore myself away. The middle section of the day was dry and isolated with no shade and it felt endless. When I really couldn't walk much more, I came across another gorge known as 'The Gap'. This is where I saw my second albino kangaroo. Two in one trip! I stayed with a very lovely couple in their private home and was treated to a feast of food (including salmon!), followed by a smorgasbord for breakfast the next morning.

On Day Eight I encountered more varied terrain and also saw my first snake of the trip, and as it was a hot day there were a lot of lizards out sunbaking. I climbed up the summit of 'Leakes Lookout', (526 m) to see the incredible 360 degree views of the surrounding area and walked through some woodland and pastures before making my way to my final accommodation on the trail. This was the last night before the walk into Eudunda and I stayed at Footeside Farm. It's an extraordinary farm that produces native plant foods. Linda, my host, made me a lovely wattle seed and roo curry followed by homemade wattle seed ice cream.

When I woke on my last day, I felt excitement and nervousness at the same time – my journey along the Lavender Federation Trail was nearly done. I walked the last part of the trail on a high. It had been over 212 kilometres of the most beautiful countryside I have ever had the pleasure of walking. I started the trail nine days earlier in Murray Bridge and finished in Eudunda. When I made it to the end of my journey and reached the Light Hotel I was delighted to meet one of the Lavender Trail committee members, Peter Herriman, who shared a celebratory drink with me. I can now say I am the first ever solo unaided end-to-end to walk The Lavender Federation Trail.

much if I sat next to him, also saw my second kingfisher – they are so small and very pretty. Then I finished the day in the town of Truro staying at the Weighbridge Motel. The first section of Day Seven had me walking through a spectacular gorge, it made me feel quite small as it towered over me. Then there was the very steep climb out the



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with the Hema Explorer Map

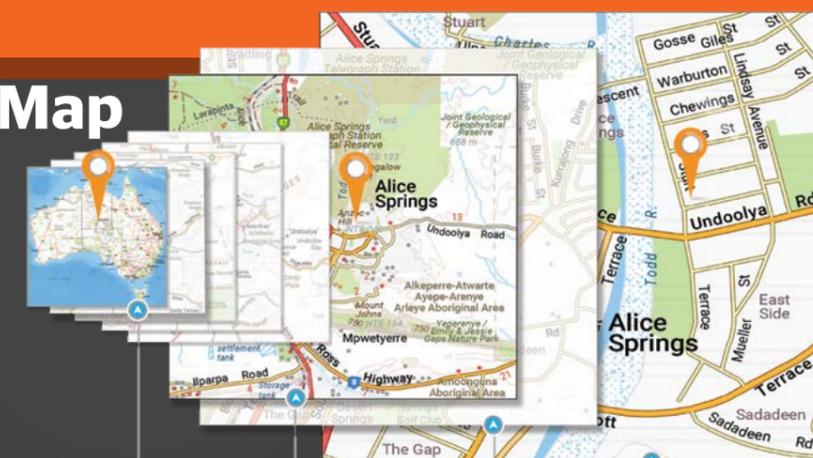
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