



THE OLIFANTS RIVER BACK-PACK TRAIL

The Olifants River Back-Pack Trail starts from Olifants Camp. The trail stretches over 4 days and 3 nights and covers approximately 42 km. It is advisable (but not necessary to book accommodation at Olifants or Letaba camps prior to and after completion of the trail. Hikers can leave their cars at Olifants Camp in a special parking area demarcated for this purpose.

There are no overnight huts on this trail. As the safety of hikers is of major importance, all participants have to bring tents and sleep in them every night while they are walking the trail. The trail leader will choose a suitable camp site every night. Participants will be responsible for setting up their own tents and for cooking their own meals. No rubbish bins or toilets are provided at any of the overnight stops – the trail is designed on a "take in, take out" basis and strictly adheres to a 'no trace camping' ethic. Please only use biodegradable products – soap and detergent – on the trail.



Day 1

Meet at Olifants Camp at 08h00 for orientation and gear check (see section on equipment). You will then be transported by open vehicle to where the trail starts. This is close to the western boundary where the Olifants River enters the Park. This is a relatively long journey that will take approximately three and a half hours. You will be thoroughly briefed on what to expect at this point. The first day is an easy hike of 4 to 5 km until you get to a camp site where you will spend your first night. After erecting tents, the group usually walks a short distance to the river to replenish water and refresh, then they return for supper and a good night's rest in the wilderness.

Day 2

Hikers wake up at the crack of dawn for the first part of the day's stretch. Approximately 15 km will be covered. It is essential to start hiking as early as possible, especially when it is hot. You will walk until lunch time or midday, with a breakfast break in between. Generally no walking will take place during the heat of the day. A siesta can then be enjoyed. During siesta time, hikers can experience the wilderness that surrounds them. Whether it's finding your favourite bird species on the banks of the Olifants River, sun tanning in the African sun, taking that photograph that has always eluded you or just lazing about, siesta time is your time to enjoy nature. After siesta, usually only a short hike is needed to cover the last few kilometres before the overnight camp is reached.

Day 3

The third day of the hike is similar to the second day and covers more or less the same distance of 15 km. For safety reasons, hikers will always walk as a group with the trail guides as leaders. It is important to remember that the guides are there for both information and protection and care should be taken that they know of your whereabouts at all times. As custodians of the bush, the trail guides are in charge for the duration of the trail and hikers should follow their lead.

Day 4

This is the last and most relaxing day of the trail - usually only a short distance of about 7 km, before hikers reach the end point at the beautiful old fig tree. The group is collected at approximately 12h00 and taken back to Olifants Camp on a short, 45 minute game drive. Now is the time to celebrate the completion of the trail and reminisce on the experiences encountered over the past four days and, maybe to plan the next time you attempt the Olifants River Back Pack Trail

THE ELEMENTS

Fires are made at night but these are not to be used for cooking purposes and are only for social, aesthetic and safety reasons. Firewood will be used sparingly – definitely no “bonfires” will be allowed. Hikers are advised to bring gas stoves for cooking or preparing food. It is recommended to bring light weight and dehydrated food. As the trail follows the Olifants River, there is adequate water suitable for drinking. However, it is necessary to use purification tablets (chlorine).

MEET OGRE

Meet your best friend for the duration of the trail! His name is Ogre and he is the auger that will make your body breaks a little easier. Your first toilet stop could be an uncomfortable experience, but Ogre will soon make it routine. Should you feel nature calling, locate Ogre from your fellow hikers who will take it in turns to carry him. The guide will help you secure a suitably safe place out of sight from the rest of the group, sufficiently distant from the river to prevent contamination. Use Ogre to drill a hole and take careful aim. When done, remember to burn the toilet paper inside the hole before you fill it with soil.

WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THE TERRAIN AND WEATHER

The landscape type is defined as Olifants River Rugged Veld and it is characterized by undulating rocky areas with the Lowveld Cluster Leaf being a common tree. On the alluvial soils which form the banks of the river, there are often dense stands of Fever Berry Trees, Red Spike thorns and Guarri bushes. There are also magnificent specimens of large trees such as Sycamore Fig, Apple Leaf, Weeping Boer Bean, Jackal Berry and Leadwood. Mopane and Red Bushwillow trees on granite dominating the areas away from the river.

The Olifants River valley is a natural high game density area and dry conditions usually heighten this. The trail is dry and dusty for most of the year. It follows the banks of the Olifants River, an area characterized by dense thickets, uneven terrain, hills and frequent gullies. This is difficult ground to negotiate on foot. The trail is designed to be a physically demanding wilderness experience, so don't be fooled by the relatively short distance! Although the trail runs over the coolest period of the year, temperatures will typically peak above 30 C and often top 40 C. Sun block is advisable – during both summer and winter. Winters are warm and mild, although hikers will require warm clothes at night when temperatures can approach 0°C. Your own water intake and that of fellow hikers should be constantly monitored to prevent dehydration. The guide will regularly stop in shaded areas for water breaks.

ABOUT YOUR SAFETY

The Olifants River Back Pack Trail is unique in the Kruger National Park in that it requires participants to walk for 4 consecutive days carrying heavy packs each day over distances from 10 to 15 km. To attempt this physically demanding hike, you will have to be reasonably fit and will also be required to present a medical certificate to prove that you are fit and in good health. All hikers will receive a comprehensive safety briefing before the trail commences. The trail leader is a qualified and armed field guide, assisted by a second armed guide, for additional peace of mind. The guides will carry first aid equipment, but will not dispense any medicine. It is strongly advised that hikers take along their own supplies of general and / or prescription medication.

There is no cell phone reception and the guides will only establish communication in medical emergencies. In such instances, hikers will be evacuated from the trail to medical care according to a pre-established medical emergency plan. Before the start of the trail, hikers will be required to sign an indemnity form. It should be noted that this trail is undertaken at the hiker's own risk and SANParks will not accept any liability in case of accidents or injuries.

WHAT SHOULD I BRING?

Equipment and enough food for the duration of the trail are the hiker's responsibility. It is strongly advised that hikers do not carry more than a quarter of their body weight. As hikers in general tend to overstock, there will be a gear check where you will be weighed with and without your rucksack. Should you exceed the maximum weight, the guide may ask you to leave some items at Olifants Camp.

REMEMBER WHAT YOU TAKE ALONG YOU HAVE TO CARRY NO GLASS ITEMS ARE ALLOWED ON THE TRAIL

CHECKLIST

- Hiking rucksack
- Lightweight tent
- Lightweight sleeping bag
- Water bottles (2 x 1 litre bottles recommended)
- Cooking and eating utensils
- Small gas stove with spare gas (no cooking fires)
- Comfortable hiking shoes (well used to prevent blisters) and spare laces
- Sufficient clothing & socks, including swim wear and a warm jacket for the cold winter nights"
- Food items
- Hat, sun block and sunglasses
- Enviro-friendly toiletries and biodegradable detergent
- Matches or lighter
- Water purification tablets
- Toilet paper
- Plastic bags for refuse and in case of rain
- Insect repellent and malaria prophylaxis
- Own basic medical kit with personal medical requirements (blister kit)
- Torch with spare batteries (head light is recommended)

OPTIONAL

- Pencil and paper
- Camera and binoculars
- Isotonic drinks and glucose sweets
- Slip on shoes to wear at night
- Needle and thread
- Mattress pad

RESERVATIONS

The Olifants River Back Pack trail is open to people between 16 and 65 years. Costs are quoted per person but the trail must be booked as a whole with 8 people per trail. Trails start on Sundays and Wednesdays respectively.

Bookings can be made by calling
Hesther van den Berg
(012) 426 5117