



THE
TRAIL FOOD
COMPANY



The Ultimate Guide to Primitive Trails

Do you want to experience an unrivalled connection with nature? Then you absolutely need to consider going on a primitive trail!

We're so excited to share our knowledge about primitive trails with you and hope that you feel just as inspired as we do to go on one of these immersive experiences.

This ultimate guide to primitive trails covers everything you need to know about going on your first primitive trail, why it's such a mind-blowing encounter and some input from industry experts.

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Why Should You Choose a Primitive Trail?

Do you sometimes feel as if you'd do anything to escape the rat race and that you just need to "disconnect" from the responsibilities and pressure of life? Let's face it. Sometimes we just need time to think, to be, and to find what grounds us. And what's better than doing this in nature?

In an age where digital burnout is real (particularly after the global pandemic), there's nothing wrong with craving a digital detox. The Dean and Director of Henley Business School Africa, Jon Foster-Pedley, describes the [benefits of a digital detox](#) in an eloquent, profoundly simplified manner.

He makes it hard not to want to embark on one of these isolated adventures and explains the benefits of taking time to turn away from the "noise":

- These timeouts give us time to think.
- A digital detox reminds us not to function in autopilot mode.
- The introspection might be uncomfortable, but it provides us with therapeutic opportunities to gain perspective on what matters and what doesn't.
- Our minds require moments without sensory overload to create a space of calmness.

Foster-Pedley reminds us that "we have the power...it's right here. It always has been." We can decide to create experiences where we can step away from what overwhelms us.

And we can certainly turn towards the wilderness, where it stands majestic in its simplicity, to remind ourselves of our interconnectedness with this world without having to be connected digitally. Essentially, a primitive trail is a back-to-basics encounter with undeniable benefits and where the sum of the experience is greater than the parts.

Spirited Adventures [describes primitive trails](#) so aptly, saying that their trails are not only once-in-a-lifetime adventures but that they are journeys that give us a greater understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Who Would Enjoy Primitive Trails?

Primitive trails are excellent for many things including:

- Time to reflect
- Authentic wilderness experiences
- Those seeking a safari experience on foot
- Keen birders

The unique experience of being in the wilderness is also a fantastic landscape for team building and facilitating change within individuals and organizations. One company that embraces the power of primitive trails is [Novo](#), which specialises in transitions within teams.

We spoke to Novo CEO Graham Fehrson about the company's "[Journeys](#)" it offers in collaboration with Lowveld Trails. He typically uses a primitive trail or wilderness immersion with a small cohort of four or five executives and entrepreneurs. He always aims to create cohorts of people from different worlds and combines the experience with one-to-one coaching and facilitated forums after the primitive trail.

Fehrson adds, "The real gift of the primitive trail, as I am sure you know, is simplicity, no connection to modern technology and a calibration of time and perspective. Each participant in a Novo Journey has the opportunity to be intentional about their participation and within the cohort find support, perspective and encouragement. Brenden and Wayne (from Lowveld Trails) add hugely to this and are exceptional individually but truly remarkable together."

Things To Look Out for on a Primitive Trail

Where to begin? The joy of primitive trails is finding something to enjoy in every moment. From looking at animal tracks to talking yourself through a hellishly hot day - it's about how you learn and grow from the experience. These are some of the typical things you can look forward to on a primitive trail:

- Birds and animals
- The small things in nature. Enjoying the space, the silence, and the experience of being in nature.
- The sunrises and sunsets.
- Sharing moments with friends or strangers who become friends.
- Access to places that most other tourists don't get to visit and won't ever get to see unless they're out on a primitive trail.

When To Hike a Primitive Trail

These are the best times to go on a primitive trail:

Lowveld Area: April to November (when it's cooler)

KwaZulu-Natal: Mid-February until mid-November (after the rainy season)

Kalahari: April & May

All About Primitive Trails

Something that will always stay with you after going on a primitive trail is the memory of sleeping under the stars. There are no tents, you are exposed to the elements, and you become part of nature.

African Bush Co.'s Massimo Rebuzzi describes primitive trails as "it's not a 5-star experience, it's a 10 000-star experience!"

Typically, you will carry everything you need. However, if there truly is water scarcity and no water can be dug up, water caching might sometimes be arranged.

There is also night watch on primitive trails, where everyone takes turns on a one-hour shift to be on the lookout for animals that might pose a risk. All cooking gets done on camping gas stoves, and guides typically only allow a very small fire at night to adhere to the no-trace policy.

How Long Is a Typical Primitive Trail?

A standard primitive trail is usually three nights and four days. However, you can arrange to have a trail that lasts up to six nights. It all depends on whom you are going with and the group you are going with.

Difficulty Rating

Your most significant considerations in determining the difficulty rating of a primitive trail depend on things like your backpack weight, the temperature (specifically heat), and access to water. It's always best to check with your guides to discuss the terrain you will cover.

For example, Lowveld Trails' [Makuya Primitive Trail](#) has some scrambling over large rocks and boulders along the Luvuvu river.

Fitness Level Required

You need to be reasonably fit to enjoy your primitive trail. Although most of these trails in the Lowveld area are relatively flat, you need to account for carrying your pack, walking in the heat, and having limited water.

Age Limit

Most companies typically have a minimum age limit of 12 and an upper age limit of between 60-65. That said, if you can provide a letter from your doctor stating that you are in good health and capable of undertaking the trail, the company could potentially waive their maximum age limit.

Maximum Numbers

Maximum numbers for a group usually consist of eight participants and two guides. Typically, the group size cannot be less than six participants plus guides because of the need to cover the watch periods at night.

Backpack Information

It's self-carry (of *everything*).

Accommodation

Nature! Your accommodation is right under the stars, on the ground, and as close as you can get to all the sounds of the outdoors. Try to include a bivy bag in your pack (some trail companies will provide these), as these really help to keep the moisture and dew off you and your sleeping bag.

Water

Water is one of the most significant limiting factors on a trail. If you run out of water or if something goes wrong with your water container, you risk becoming a liability to the rest of your group.

We recommend that you carry between 2ℓ-3ℓ of water. However, this amount depends on the time of year and the location of your trail, as it determines the temperature and whether you might have access to rivers.

Depending on the trail, location, and the time of year, you might be able to get water from the river, dig for water in a riverbed, or you might need to rely on water caches. You may not necessarily always have to carry 3ℓ of water all the time. Preferably carry your water in more than one container (it's always good to have a backup).

Trails Guide Brenden Pienaar from Lowveld Trails spoke to us about using hydration packs (bladders) on primitive trails. He says, "I've seen them fail too many times. Punctures, pops,

leaks, valve failure, mouthpiece failure, etc, etc. The simpler the container, the less can go wrong. This is my personal opinion though."

So, although a bladder might be a super convenient option, it could become a disaster if you're suddenly left without water and a drenched sleeping bag.

Do you need to take water purifying drops or a water purifier?

Our advice is to definitely take one or the other if not both – it's always better to be safe than sorry. We prefer a water purifier and have an [MSR TrailShot Pocket-Sized Water Filter](#).

If you don't like the taste of the water on the trail, sachets of energy drinks like Game, etc., are often helpful in disguising the taste of water than for energy per se.

Collapsible buckets or portable showers are great for collecting and storing water from the source while at camp – especially for washing up, brushing your teeth, and having water at night. Although, if you use the Trail Food Co.'s fabulous cook-in bags, you won't need to wash up any pots (just saying)!

Facilities

Zip. Zero. Nada. And that's the beauty of it! The aim is to experience nature and to leave it undisturbed.

Each trail group will carry a small spade to dig holes to get rid of bodily waste. Toilet paper typically gets burned after use.

Important Information

Participants will need to complete indemnity forms. Most trails companies will have a range of insurances and policies with SATIB, which includes comprehensive Public Liability cover and a Medivac plan. This insurance also covers international guests. The companies also usually have satellite phones or two-way radios for emergency communication.

Different Options for Primitive Trails

This list of primitive trail options is certainly not exhaustive - and we're sure there are others that we didn't mention here. However, these are the primitive trails we've been on or heard of. Every trail below is unique, so we suggest that you get in touch with the trail provider for specific details.

[Lowveld Trails](#)

- Timbavati
- Makuya
- Kalahari

[African Bush Co.](#)

- Botswana
- Lowveld
- KwaZulu-Natal

[Tchagra Trails](#)

- Balule
- Klaserie

[African Born Safaris](#)

- Pafuri

[Shangani Trails](#)

- Makuleke Concession in Pafuri (Great Kruger National Park)

[Colin Patrick Training](#)

- Get in touch with Colin Patrick to find out more about his primitive trail options.

[Spirited Adventures](#)

- Reach out to Spirited Adventures to find out more about their primitive trail experiences.

[Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife](#)

- iMfolozi Wilderness Trails - Hluluwe-iMfolozi Park

[Fraser Gear](#)

- Niassa Reserve in Northern Mozambique (once per year)

Costs for Primitive Trails

The cost to go on a primitive trail varies depending on the location, duration, and experience. You can expect to pay anywhere between R4 000 per person for a 3-night trail to R20 000 per person for a 9-day trail in Northern Mozambique.

What To Pack for a Primitive Trail

Check out our super handy tips on [what to pack](#) for your next trail!

How To Pack for a Primitive Trail

If you're unsure [how to pack your backpack](#), take a look at our tips!

FAQs

Do you still have some lingering questions? Here are some of the most common questions others ask about primitive trails.

What are some of the first questions people ask about primitive trails?

People's questions usually relate to their apprehensions since they're preparing to step out of their comfort zones. Most questions are trivial and focus on clothing, water, equipment, food, snakes, and scorpions on the trail.

Can you have a porter on a primitive trail?

No, there are no porters or slackpacking options on primitive trails.

Isn't it dangerous to sleep in the open in a game reserve?

There are, of course, risks associated with primitive trails. However, if you are with a qualified and experienced guide, then no, it's not dangerous. These skills are why it takes so long to become a qualified trails guide - they need to know what they are doing, how to assess situations, understand animal behaviour, and learn how to handle a rifle.

It's also why people need to do night watch on a primitive trail. Listen to your guide. Be sensible. And enjoy the experience!

How far do you walk on a primitive trail?

The distances of a primitive trail depend on the group's fitness, the time of year (the temperature), and the terrain that is getting covered.

How cold does it get on a primitive trail?

It can get extremely cold on a primitive trail, particularly in winter. It's essential that you have a quality sleeping bag, a ground sheet, and layers.

What do you do if it rains on a primitive trail?

Depending on where and when you hike, rain is not often an issue. But, since you never know, two essentials you should have with you are a bivy bag and a poncho. You can also take a ground sheet to turn it into a cover if necessary.

Should you worry about malaria on a primitive trail?

Typically, you won't want to go on trails over the peak rainy season - which is malaria season. You can, however, carry and string up a mosquito net.

Final Thoughts

We told you that primitive trails are everything and more! We hope that you can see the benefits that lie in wait - and that all your concerns about going on a primitive trail have been put at ease. You won't check in at a luxury lodge, but you will return feeling refreshed, reset, and more connected with the world around you.

If you'd like ideas for lightweight, super convenient primitive trail hiking meals, check out our wide selection of [Multi-Day Packs](#). These will cover all your meals and snacks from breakfast to dinner with zero fuss.

Have you been on a primitive trail? Are you planning to go on one soon? Let us know about your experience or what you're looking forward to - we love to hear from you!