



Hidden gems of the Great Western Woodlands

Carolyn Thomson-Dans is a senior projects officer for the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) and has written numerous articles and books for the department. She can be contacted by email (carolyn.thomson-dans@dec.wa.gov.au).

Ann Storrie has written and taken photographs for several DEC publications and a range of *LANDSCOPE* articles. She can be contacted by email (naturescapes.au@hotmail.com).

The Great Western Woodlands have many little-known but beautiful spots where visitors can camp under the stars or enjoy a day trip. The woodlands are rich in Aboriginal and other Australian history, with numerous relics from mining, wood cutting and pastoralism days dotted through the salmon gums, gimlets and other woodland communities.

words by Carolyn Thomson-Dans and Ann Storrie
photos by Ann Storrie

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Covering almost 16 million hectares, the Great Western Woodlands is the largest remaining intact Mediterranean climate woodland on Earth. More than a fifth of Australia's native plant species (more than 3,000 species) are found here, including 20 per cent of Australia's eucalypt species (more than 160 species). The Great Western Woodlands is a culturally significant place for Aboriginal people, who continue to have a strong connection to their country. The woodlands offer rewarding places to visit, with numerous granite outcrops, secluded bush camping areas and historic attractions scattered across this large part of Western Australia's heartland.

Elachbutting Rock

Lying at the western edge of the Great Western Woodlands, about 50 kilometres north-east of Mukinbudin, Elachbutting Rock is a spectacular

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Victoria Rock Nature Reserve on the Holland Track.

Below Western wave at Elachbutting Rock.

natural rock formation that towers above the surrounding woodlands and countryside.

A six-kilometre drive track winds through dense shrubs and trees at the base of this massive monolith to a camping area with toilet facilities on the eastern side of the rock. A walk track on the western side takes visitors to a colourful wave formation, similar to that of Hyden's Wave Rock, and to Monty's Pass, a 40-metre tunnel formed by a huge slab of rock that has broken from the main formation. An echoing cave, a little like an amphitheatre, is found a little further around the rock.

Several other rocks and nature reserves in this area are also worth visiting. There are interesting boulders and rock formations on and around Yanneymoon Hill in Yanneymoon Nature Reserve, another spectacular granite outcrop about 10 kilometres south of Elachbutting Rock, north-west of Elachbutting, boasts the largest rock catchment tank in Australia and features a spectacular balancing rock and Aboriginal hand paintings. Chiddarcooping Reserve to the south has 5,262 hectares of granite,

breakaway and bush with a creek bed that, in springtime, is lined with everlastings. East of Chiddarcooping, Baladjie Lake Nature Reserve has extensive rock outcrops. Baladjie Rock affords extensive views across the lake and surrounding woodland.

Proposed Jaurdi conservation reserve

Jaurdi, a pastoral station from 1968, was purchased by the state government in 1989 because of its high conservation values. The proposed 289,000-hectare reserve contains extensive areas of mature eucalypt woodland in the north and regrowth woodland from clearfelling that occurred as a result of timber cutting from 1916 to 1921. The converted station is now a great place for walking, nature observation, picnicking, camping and fishing for yabbies. Camping is available at the old homestead site.

An old Goldfields travel route, the Gus Luck Track, from Yellowdine to Goongarrie, runs through the area. Now a rough four-wheel-drive track, it follows a series of rocks from Darrine to 71 Mile Rock where old tin-covered and rock-lined soaks and wells receive



their water as run-off from adjoining granite rocks. Legible graffiti on the lid of one of these soaks dates back to 1939. The Gus Luck Track can be very rough and demanding in places.

Mount Palmer

The ghost town of Mount Palmer provides a poignant detour for those interested in the mining history of the Great Western Woodlands. It is named after Augustus Palmer who found gold here in 1934 with two others.

A 20-head battery was erected here in 1935, with 130 men employed by 1937. Hessian, tin and canvas buildings soon sprang up. At its zenith, the town had a population of about 500. However, labour shortages during the Second World War took their toll and by June 1944 the mine closed. Officially, 4,928 kilograms of gold were produced from 310,728 tons of rock but the unofficial figures are thought to be a lot higher.

Today virtually all that remains of the town's imposing two-storey hotel is its main arch. Also visible are concrete foundations of the mine buildings,

Right Western bearded dragon (*Pogona minor minima*).

treatment plants, cyanide tanks, water cooling dams and tailing dump, along with a lone grave and headstone. Interpretive signs provide information about the former town's gold mining history.

Karalee Rock and Dam

Water and transportation were two key concerns in the development of the Goldfields, and Karalee Rock was important in both respects.

A railway was constructed between Southern Cross and Coolgardie in 1895–96. Steam transport required large amounts of water and the salt content of scheme water from the new Goldfields pipeline was too high, as it could corrode the engines. The railway passed about three kilometres south of Karalee Rock so a dam was built at Karalee in 1897 to provide water for the trains. Walls of granite slabs, all cut from the top of the rock and laid by





hand, surround the area's two massive granite rocks. Water from the rocks flowed to a stone-lined sluice which fed into a large earthen reservoir. The water was then piped to an overhead tank adjacent to the railway.

There is a large, shady camping area beneath beautiful gimlet and other eucalypts near the dam. Walks around the dam beside the old aqueduct and to the top of the rock take in good views of the surrounding countryside. Visitors can also see part of the old forge that operated during the construction of the dam. Wildflowers abound in spring and the eucalypts are picturesque year round.

Goldfields Woodlands National Park

Goldfields Woodlands National Park straddles the Great Eastern Highway 60 kilometres west of Coolgardie, running for another 40 kilometres beside the road. It is part of a 152,500-hectare conservation reserve network that includes Boorabbin National Park to the west, Victoria Rock Nature Reserve and a special management area to the south and east. These reserves provide visitors driving east with their first views of the state's spectacular spring and summer wildflower displays of the kwongan sandplain heaths.

Camping sites at Boondi Rock and Victoria Rock have been used for a similar purpose by the local Aboriginal people for many thousands of years. Water could be collected from rain-filled hollows known as gnammas (natural formations in the rock sometimes enlarged by Aboriginal people using fire to crack the rocks) or from soaks at the edge of rock outcrops, while the surrounding woodlands were rich in wildlife resources.

Passing through the park, with a site at Woolgangie Rock, is the Golden Pipeline Heritage Trail.

Top left Karalee Rock camping area.

Middle left Thorny devil on the Holland Track.

Left Goldfields Woodlands National Park, near Victoria Rock.



Above Camp at Thursday Rock along the historic Holland Track.

The trail provides a tourist route incorporating different biological and historical features including distinctive rock catchments along the historic Goldfields railway and pipeline running parallel to the Great Eastern Highway.

The historic Holland Track from Broomehill to Coolgardie crosses the park from Diamond Rock through to Thursday Rock and Victoria Rock to Coolgardie. This route is now a popular outback four-wheel-drive track. A free phone application can be downloaded from everytrail.com/guide/holland-track-drive-trail to help travellers explore the area.

Burra Rock

Burra Rock Conservation Park features several large granite rocks surrounded by regrowth woodland. It also has a dam and catchment wall that supplied water for steam-driven engines on the narrow-gauge railways (woodlines) bringing timber to Kalgoorlie-Boulder in the late 1920s.

The regrowth woodland around Burra Rock is the result of clearfelling in 1927 to supply fuel wood for steam-driven engines and structural timber for the gold mining industry.

At Burra Rock Dam, visitors are assured of a great view and possibly a feed of yabbies. Nature study and exploring the rock are other popular activities. The view from the summit stretches over the regenerated woodlands as far as the eye can see.

Cave Hill

Cave Hill Nature Reserve is another excellent camping spot and is also suitable for longer day trips from Kalgoorlie-Boulder or Coolgardie. The reserve is dominated by a spectacular granite outcrop, with a large cave formation on the western side, which gives the rock its name. The rock also acts as a catchment for a number of dams. The surrounding woodland offers pleasant sites for picnics, walks and wildlife viewing.

Cave Hill, which rises 90 metres above the surrounding country, originated as part of a huge mass of molten rock that formed within the Earth's crust. It was first exposed as a low hill about 60 million years ago. Rainwater flowing across the rock collected in the soft ground at its edge, where it slowly eroded the underlying granite, turning it into sand and clays and creating flared rock slopes. For the past five million years, heat, cold, expanding salt crystals, and weak acids from decaying plant debris and rainwater gradually enlarged fractures and joints in the exposed rock surface to create fantastic caverns and the cave for which Cave Hill is named. Some of these horizontal joints are clearly visible in the cave.



Above Karlkurla Bushland Park, Kalgoorlie.

Rowles Lagoon Conservation Park

Rowles Lagoon Conservation Park, together with its adjacent lakes, is a popular recreation and camping area. The freshwater lagoon relies on rainfall to maintain its depth. When full, it offers excellent opportunities for water-based recreation and wetland studies. Activities include birdwatching, swimming, catching yabbies and, when the water depth permits, boating. There are barbecues and picnic tables in shaded areas around the lagoon, and toilets are provided.

Rowles Lagoon and the surrounding Clear, Carnage and Muddy lakes are a birdwatcher's paradise. The lakes are included on Australia's register of significant wetlands. Black swans (*Cygnus atratus*), pink-eared ducks (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*) and wood ducks (*Chenonetta jubata*) are common, and several rare species can sometimes be seen, including Australia's rarest waterbird, the freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*).

Proposed Credo conservation reserve

The proposed Credo conservation reserve, which surrounds much of Rowles Lagoon and the Clear and Muddy lakes reserves, is a former pastoral lease. More than 212,000 hectares were purchased by the state government in 2007 because of the area's significant conservation value. It is an important catchment area for Rowles Lagoon as it includes Canegrass Lagoon to the east. These freshwater wetlands are rare in the Great Western Woodlands and contain many plant species and communities not found elsewhere. It is a significant area for local Aboriginal people who worked on the station and whose ancestors camped at Rowles Lagoon.

Credo Homestead, west of Rowles Lagoon, provides basic accommodation in the shearers' quarters. There is much to see on the property including old mines, large rocky outcrops, beautiful eucalypt woodlands and several dams in which yabbies can be collected. This gold-producing country also supported several towns, the ruins of which can be explored on the property. Most of the tracks on the former station are for four-wheel-drive vehicles only.

Karlkurla Bushland Park

Karlkurla Bushland Park (pronounced 'gull-gar-la' and named after an important bush tucker plant) is 206 hectares of restored natural bush just four kilometres north-west of the main street of Kalgoorlie. The restoration project was undertaken by the Kalgoorlie-Boulder Urban Landcare Group in 1999 to provide recreation, interpretive and educational opportunities in a woodland setting while preserving the natural values of the woodlands.

A network of walk trails through the park has interpretive signs providing information about many of the Goldfield's common, and often endemic, plant species. Picnic tables and chairs are dotted throughout the park. A rotunda at Katunga Lookout stands 411 metres above sea level and is the highest natural point in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, providing sweeping views of the bushland and city.

Peak Charles National Park

Towering 500 metres above the surrounding plains, Peak Charles is visible for more than 50 kilometres in all directions and is the tallest hill of the Great Western Woodlands.



Above Peak Charles.

Below Pink-eared ducks.

It has a mosaic of vegetation types that are unique in the Great Western Woodlands, with many plants growing at the inland margins of their ranges and a number of locally endemic species (see 'Peak Charles National Park: a remote eastern goldfields wilderness', *LANDSCOPE*, Winter 2011).

A medium, two-kilometre, one-hour climb takes you to the Peak Charles lookout with its spectacular views over surrounding areas. The granite peak has weathered to various orange and brown hues. More than 30 different species of orchid can be found in the park. The park's shrublands are the most diverse in the Great Western Woodlands. About 40 million years ago, Peak Charles was an island, and wave-cut platforms can be seen on its upper slopes.

Peak Charles has a small campground with few facilities. For most of the year there is no fresh water so visitors need to be totally self sufficient.

New field guide

The Great Western Woodlands might be a little off the beaten track, but that is one of its great attractions. All these and more hidden wonders

can be discovered in a new field guide for visitors to the Great Western Woodlands which will be published by the Department of Environment and Conservation in the coming months. The guide will also provide fascinating stories about the history of the Great Western Woodlands, its tracks and trails, and the main trees, wildflowers, mammals, reptiles and birds that visitors are likely to see when they explore this distinctive area.

The guide is being produced to increase awareness, understanding and involvement of the Great Western

Woodlands, as part of the Western Australian Government's *Biodiversity and Cultural Conservation Strategy for the Great Western Woodlands* (see 'The Great Western Woodlands: protecting our biological richness', *LANDSCOPE*, Summer 2010–11). Part of the strategy also involves upgrading facilities at Peak Charles and Credo to enhance visitor experiences.

