

Landscape

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Cover — Looking west over Groper Bluff towards Cape Riche on the south coast of Western Australia.

No other national park reflects the changing attitudes to conservation and land management over the years than does Yanchep, 53 km north of Perth on the coastal plain, and one of the oldest of WA's parks. Established in 1903 for 'Protection and Preservation of Caves and Flora and for a Health and Recreation Pleasure Resort', Yanchep reveals a series of developments that are generally not contemplated in national parks being established today.

Entrance to the park immediately gives the visitor an impression of a garden. Graceful lemon-scented gums, planted by children as an Arbor Day tribute



Charm of Yanchep

by *David Lamont and Helen Bradbury*

in 1962, line the drive to the lake-side parking facilities. Stately stone buildings create an atmosphere of established ease, and people wander on mown lawns under shade trees, many of which are exotic. Down at the jetty a launch chugs off around the lake, gliding tourists around man-made islands. Named after a philanthropist who funded much of the developments in the park during the 1930s, this 'Loch McNess' feels more like the Florida Everglades than any Scottish counterpart. Paperbarks link arms across the islands, turtles scud through the reeds, tiger snakes are often glimpsed in repose. Between the wars, the lake was dredged, and playing

fields, lodges and the Yanchep Inn were constructed. Many species of flora and fauna were introduced to the park at this time. Carp is now the dominant species of fish in Loch McNess, and one of the most popular attractions of the park is Western Australia's only colony of koalas, introduced in 1938. Established originally to preserve the wonderland cave world of the calcareous substrata of the area, Yanchep soon became, it seems, more of a resort than an area for natural preservation. Visitors to the park still have the opportunity to be escorted through the Crystal Cave, an example of the caves opened in the 1920s.

An atmosphere of

entertainment pervades the park and creates a unique impression of the history of attitudes to outdoor living. Initiatives taken in the 1960s reinforced the recreation facilities of the park and provided a golf course, more playing fields, a museum and a re-vamped swimming pool. Unlike most of WA's national parks, Yanchep became a venue for socialising, not for solitude.

A Walk in the Wetlands

Until September 1984, the visitor interested in studying waterfowl, reptiles, mammals and flora of a lake-side habitat would not have chosen

Yanchep. For despite the fact that the park encloses over 100 ha of coastal wetland, much of the swamp environment has been inaccessible. In March 1983, however, a lightning strike set off a wildfire through the dense swamp undergrowth, clearing vegetation around the lake and affording park rangers the opportunity of establishing one of WA's few wetland walks.

The walk trail is constructed around the south-west perimeter of Loch McNess and has been built in three sections. The basis for route selection was proximity to the water's edge and the incorporation of areas of scenic beauty.

The first 500 m of the trail traverses a causeway between the two halves of Loch McNess. This causeway was constructed during the 1930s from the dredgings of the deeper part of the lake and has built up a solid vegetation layer. The trail here is lined with sword sedge (*Lepidosperma gladiatum*) which, as the name implies, is sharp-edged and under normal conditions is an efficient deterrent to any intruder. Yanjidi, the bulrush (*Typha* species), also grows along the trail edge and gives this walk its distinctive image. Both Yanjidi and Yanchep are names derived from the aboriginal name for the bulrush. Sedge

meadows that were previously hidden from view grow each side of the causeway and include species such as *Schoenoplectus validus*, *Lepidosperma drummondii*, *Baumea articulata*, *B. juncea*, *B. laxa*, and *Typha orientalis*. This dense growth and relative isolation allows waterfowl to breed unmolested. Species of waterfowl found in this area include *Tachybaptus novaehollandiae* (Australian Grebe), *Cygnus atratus* (Black Swan), *Anas superciliosa* (Black Duck), *Biziura lobata* (Musk Duck), *Chenonetta jubata* (Maned Duck) and *Porphyrio porphyrio* (Purple Swamphen).

An extensive grove of ragged-trunked paperbarks (*Melaleuca rhapsiophylla*) envelops a rest site towards the end of the causeway section. Shady and tranquil, this shade house provides a magnificent venue for bird watching and for photography. From this area many species of frogs can be heard calling.

Bridge from the Past

The path to the rest area traverses the only bridge on the Yanjidi Trail and this construction forms another interesting link in the history of Yanchep National Park.

The improvements to the lake were funded by a grant of £11,600 given by Sir Charles

McNess to the State Gardens Board in 1930. Used for the relief of distress of the unemployed brought about by the Depression, the funds were channelled into public works around the park. Dredging of the lake for recreation purposes was commenced at this time, and the dredge used was a massive jarrah construction — so solid that it was never removed from Loch McNess at the completion of the work. It lay abandoned, half submerged, until recent times when it was refloated. During the forty years of its idleness the dredge was host to a paperbark which grew on the submerged decking. The tree stump can still be seen on the resurrected dredge which is now used as the trail bridge. History does indeed repeat itself: the workers who re-fitted the dredge and who constructed the Yanjidi Trail were also relief workers.

Circling the Lake

The western section of the trail follows remnants of a pathway used by military personnel who bivouacked nearby during the war years. Here billabongs filled with black water mirror surrounding paperbarks of a noteworthy size. The trail at this point is lined by *Acacia saligna* and *Spyridium globulosum*, which create a maze of vegetation through which the path winds.

Once through the maze, the walker is guided through a change of terrain. Limestone caprock marks the beginning of tuart/banksia woodland. The elevation gained in traversing a limestone spur allows vistas of Loch McNess and its fringing environs. In some places tuart (*Eucalyptus gomphocephala*) and swamp banksia (*Banksia littoralis*) grow almost to the water's edge.

The trail deviates from the lake and passes a pair of huge tuarts. Bole circumference of one is over six metres, and the tree is estimated to be at least 400 years old. Time, termites and fire have all contributed to the sculptured character of the

Boating on Loch McNess — a perennial pleasure.



enormous boles. This idyllic setting was chosen as the second rest site on the trail, and furnished with a table and log seating.

Bird life in the area is profuse; honey-eaters, fantails and wrens are common residents. Tiger snakes (*Notechis scutatus occidentalis*) and long-necked turtles (*Chelodina oblonga*) may also be spotted from this rest area, and nearby a colony of water rats (*Hydromis chrysogaster*) has been observed.

The third and final section of Yanjidi Trail skirts the remainder of Loch McNess and goes through more vegetation types which in turn provide various wildlife habitats.

The shrub yellowtail flower (*Anthocercis ilicifolia*) thrives at this end of the trail. *Barnardius zonarius*, the Port Lincoln Ringneck, can often be seen performing balancing feats on the most flimsy stems of this plant as it nibbles at the blossom, quite unperturbed by human presence. Firewood banksia (*Banksia menziesii*) grows here, as does bull banksia (*Banksia grandis*). The trail ends after traversing the sunklands of the south end of the lake, again providing a unique opportunity to observe this wetland environment. The Yanjidi Trail contrasts with the manicured lawns where it ends.

For many years Yanchep's countless visitors have not ventured from the koalas, caves and swimming pool. Now Yanchep offers, in one-and-a-half hours, a walk that is accessible to people of all ages through the enticing beauty of the wetland environs. The latest recreation initiatives reflect the 1980s view of environmental recreation and provide yet another alternative for pleasure in this park. The charm of Yanchep is overwhelming. What is it to be: a thirties fox-trot, a sixties golf game or an eighties walk?



A leisurely stroll around the Yanjidi Trail reveals such delights of unspoiled nature as these paperbarks (*Melaleuca raphiophylla*).

A. Crabb



Stately stone buildings create an atmosphere of established ease.

A. Crabb

Evening draws over Loch McNess reflecting the deep serenity of Yanchep.



A. Crabb