



THE Cape to Cape TRACK

Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park is a place of rare and diverse beauty. Beautiful limestone caves, majestic karri forest, endangered plants and animals, and magnificent coastal views are just a few of the natural wonders that attract well over one million visitors to the park each year. Now, visitors can get a whole new perspective of the park by walking all or parts of the Cape to Cape Track.

The recently opened Cape to Cape Track offers visitors to the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park the opportunity to experience nature on intimate terms. The track runs from Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin, hugging the coast and often diverting for long tracts along the beach. Other parts of the track drift inland, leading walkers through woodlands and forest.

The 133-kilometre track has been constructed opportunistically; making use of established four-wheel-drive tracks in many places. The objective was to create an alignment that brings people in close contact with the environment while creating as little disturbance as possible, on a minimal budget. This was finally realised when the track was opened officially in April 2001.

HISTORY

The 1988 Australian Bicentennial celebrations saw the first real progress on the idea of a walk from Cape Naturaliste to



Cape Leeuwin. Staff from the Department of Conservation and Land Management saw an opportunity to plan and build the track in the form of a \$50,000 Bicentennial grant, which they applied for and won. Community consultation during the planning generated a great deal of enthusiasm for the proposal.

During the planning process, it was decided to call the trail the Cape Naturaliste to Cape Leeuwin Heritage

Above: Cape Leeuwin lighthouse was built in 1895. It is 53 metres high and marks the southern end of the track.
Photo – Alex Bond

Trail. A track logo was proposed as well as features for the track itself, such as campsites and small loop trails. Volunteer help from the community and a cash commitment from the department were important in obtaining the initial grant.

Unfortunately, because the management plan for the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park was delayed, the Bicentennial grant could not be utilised before the expenditure deadline of 30 September 1988, and was returned.

This was a major disappointment, but local interest remained high and it was only a matter of time before department staff and local volunteer groups resurrected the idea. Due to their relative ease of construction and public demand, Sections One (Cape Naturaliste to Wyadup) and Five (Hamelin Bay to Cape Leeuwin) were tackled first.

Section Five was opened officially on Sunday, 18 October 1996. A Regional Employment Action Program, based in Augusta, achieved the major hand tool work, and the department contributed some machine time in order to complete the section.

Section One was completed and opened a short time later, thanks to help

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Coastal heath and granite at Smiths Beach, Yallingup.
Photo – Bill Bachman

Above left: This seat provides a rest point overlooking the beach at Wyadup. Wyadup carpark is in the background.

Left: Redgate Beach in summer with the sandbar across Calgardup Brook.
Photos – Jane Scott





Above: Busselton Senior High School students working on the track near Gracetown.

Photo - Neil Taylor

Above right: Boodjidup Bridge and steps built by a Green Corp program.

Right: The Cape to Cape Track's northernmost trailhead sign at the intersection with Lighthouse Walk.

Photos - Jane Scott



from participants of a Local Employment Action Program, school students, volunteers from the Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers, and other interested individuals who contributed time and labour. Once these two sections were completed and usage grew, community expectations began to mount.

Special mention needs to be made of the contribution by the Margaret River and Busselton Senior High Schools. Through the efforts of their in-house chaplains, both schools adopted sections of the trail to build with small groups of students. Hand tools were used to construct paths and lookouts on large tracts of Sections Two and Four. The work was carried out over several years and with various students.

Gradually, more and more people began to walk the track and the pressure was on to complete the project.

The Friends of the Cape to Cape Track Incorporated group was formed on 9 December 1998. Without the assistance and predominant force of the 'Friends', it is unlikely that the track would have been finished so quickly.

Right: Volunteers laying 'brushing' on the Cape to Cape Track near Moses Rock.

Photo - Neil Taylor

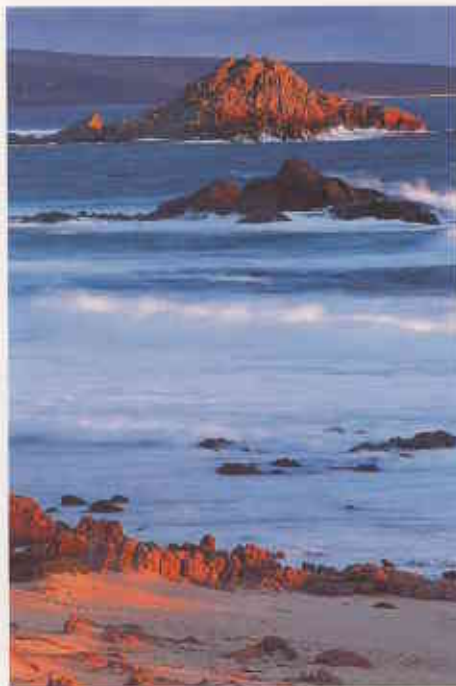
The group has obtained and contributed around \$200,000 in grants, including substantial grants from Trailswest, Coastcare, Healthways and the Lotteries Commission. It has also set up an adoptees program, developed on lines borrowed from that of the Bibbulmun Track, whereby interested groups, families and individuals can 'adopt' a short length of the Cape to Cape Track, by becoming responsible for maintenance for that section. The Friends group has also begun compiling a register of local accommodation houses that offer a drop off and pick up service to walkers along the track.

WHY WALK THE TRACK?

The Cape to Cape Track is a 'four seasons' walk that can be tackled by hikers in its entirety or by more casual walkers using a wide variety of short-walk options. Many people are walking the track in short bursts and hope to get their 'End to End' certificate over several years! The department and the Friends group see the track more as a series of short walks, because it is easy to access via the numerous roads and tracks that lead to the coast. This provides opportunities for short-stay holidaymakers as well as locals and long distance hikers.

The track is marked with pine posts





displaying the track logo. Maps and books that highlight the main attractions of each section are available to assist individuals in choosing the most suitable walk option.

PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Walkers are frequently delighted by the myriad bird life to be seen along the entire length of the track. Close to the coast, the heathland supports a variety of small birds. Quiet and patient observers may be rewarded by a glimpse of a white-browed scrub-wren, evasive southern emu-wren or red-eared firetail.

Red-tailed and long-billed black-cockatoos inhabit the bush and forest, while small groups of rock parrots may be seen along the beach.

The success of the department's Western Shield baiting program has enabled many small mammals to make

a comeback in the area. Quendas, or southern brown bandicoots, are increasingly being spotted during the day, while at night, you may catch a glimpse of a brush-tailed phascogale, or wambenger. If camping overnight, you are advised to secure provisions from the very sociable brushtail possums, which often visit campsites.

In warmer weather, reptiles may be seen basking in the sun, though they usually slither away long before being approached. Dugites and tiger snakes are prevalent in Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park and should be avoided. Fortunate walkers may come across the distinctively marked but rarely seen carpet python. Bobtails are frequently found sunbaking on the path, while less commonly encountered lizards include the southern heath monitor and the western bearded dragon.

The vegetation along the Cape to Cape Track is just as varied as the wildlife. The most obvious are the coastal heath plant communities. Although the vegetation may seem similar, there are major changes from north to south, and an ever-changing array of plants to enjoy. Wildflowers are most



Above: Quendas have become more abundant since fox numbers were reduced under Western Shield.
Photo – Marie Lochman

Top left: A rainbow leads walkers along Willyabrup Cliffs.
Photo – Ray Forma

Centre left: Sunset at Sugarloaf Rock near Cape Naturaliste.
Photo – Alex Bond

Left: Coral vine and tree hovea at Boranup in the Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park.
Photo – Alex Bond



spectacular in spring, but there is something interesting to see all year round—and to smell, as many of the heathland plants have aromatic leaves or scented blossoms. And for a change of scenery, the quiet cool of the karri forest offers a complete contrast and welcome shade during the summer months.

FROM NORTH TO SOUTH

The Cape to Cape Track can be walked from north to south or vice versa. It can be completed in five days, five months or over several years. But either way, there is something for everyone to enjoy.

The northernmost portion of the track follows a fairly level cliff top path with magnificent ocean views. Beach access is limited for the most part, with the exception of Yallingup and Smiths Beach. The track begins near the Cape Naturaliste Lighthouse and passes by Willanup Spring, Sugarloaf Rock, Three Bears (a popular surfing spot) and Canal Rocks. Humpback whales may be spotted on their annual migration south from late September to mid-December.

The stretch of track between Wyadup and Gracetown offers some of the most spectacular coastal views. This section of Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park is very narrow, but the scenery is breathtaking, with the track winding along rugged cliffs and among granite boulders. Cape Clairault is a prominent dune-topped landmark, visible for several kilometres up and down the beach. Quinninup Falls, a 17-metre winter waterfall flowing down a natural granite wall, can be seen from a distance when in full rush, but declines to a water-hole in summer.

Willyabrup Cliffs, formed from granitic gneiss, rise 40 metres above sea



level and are popular with abseilers and climbers. Although the path is aligned well back from the cliff face for safety reasons (to prevent people from knocking rocks over the edge or treading on equipment), you are guaranteed a spectacular view as you approach.

Gentle slopes, low ridges and easy bush trails have made the length of track from Cowaramup Bay to Redgate Beach extremely popular. Starting out along the coast, this part of the track diverts slightly inland near the historic Ellensbrook Homestead, passing the photogenic Meekadarabee Falls and Cave.

Cape Mentelle is an unusual feature composed entirely of limestone rather

Above left: Hooded plover.

Photo – Hans & Judy Beste/Lochman
Transparencies

Above: Limestone cliffs along the edge of Geographe Bay near Cape Naturaliste.

Photo – Bill Bachman

than granite. Consisting of a number of high headlands carved up by deeply indented bays, the area is a haven for birds, particularly ospreys.

From the steep ridge overlooking the Boodjidup Brook valley, you will be captivated by the contrast of ocean views on one side of the track and green farmlands and vineyards on the other.

Many remote beaches, and some of the more heavily visited beaches such as Redgate, are frequently inhabited by



the endangered hooded plover, which is endemic to the south coast of WA. Hooded plovers are small black and white birds that nest on open beaches. Tread carefully during the breeding season, which extends from September to January, and report any sightings or evidence of nesting to the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Beaches, cliff tops and cool shady forested areas of the Redgate to Hamelin Bay section offer a memorable experience of the Leeuwin-Naturaliste Ridge. The cliff top walk between Bob's Hollow and Contos is considered by some to be the most scenic segment of the entire Cape to Cape Track. However, the trail runs close to the cliff top and is quite rocky in places, so extra care is required.

From Contos Campground, the track moves inland, to take advantage of the park's width. The eight-kilometre easy trek through the karri trees of the Boranup Forest may leave you feeling overawed and with a sense of isolation, despite the proximity of civilisation.

From Hamelin Bay to Cape Leeuwin, the track stays mainly alongside the coastline. With many long stretches of soft beach sand and a wild yet breathtaking hike from Cosy Corner to Skippy Rock, this is probably the most challenging section of the whole walk. Cosy Corner is particularly beautiful, with its white sandy beach, red granite headlands and offshore limestone islands that are home to thousands of seabirds.

FUTURE

The future wellbeing of the Cape to Cape Track is in the hands of both the Friends of the Cape to Cape Track

Incorporated and the Department of Conservation and Land Management. Cooperation between local volunteers and the department has enabled the track to be where it is today, and its continued strong support will be vital if the Friends group is to continue and grow in number.

Although the 'adoptee' program is only in its early stages, it is expected to provide a strong local support network that will sustain the life of the track. Almost the entire track has been adopted, but more adoptees are required to cover some areas and to assist in others. Adoptees are required to walk their section a minimum of four times per year, reporting and repairing minor problems and referring bigger problems to the department.

The exact number of people walking the Cape to Cape Track is presently unknown, but it is clear that the number of walkers is growing rapidly.

Above left: A machine-cut section of the track north of Left-Handers.
Photo – Jane Scott

Above: Walkers enjoying the view from the top of Willyabrup Cliffs.
Photo – Rob Olver

Registration stations were built at both ends of the track in July 2001 and foot counters have now been installed. The Friends group has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the department to ensure the roles and responsibilities of both parties are clear. A philosophy for the use and future development of the track is being finalised so that the track offers a unique experience for visitors and a major tourism attraction for the Capes area. But whatever the future may hold, the Cape to Cape Track will remain a great example of how a local community and a government agency can work together to fulfil a common vision.

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Jane Scott is the President of the Friends of the Cape to Cape Track Inc., and devotes a lot of her spare time to the track. She has written several books including *The Cape to Cape Track Guidebook*, which is an excellent read for anyone intending to walk the track. Jane can be contacted on (08) 9757 6327.

Neil Taylor was one of the initiators of the track. He has worked for the Department of Conservation and Land Management in Busselton as a Recreation Officer for seven years. Neil still oversees the progress of work on the Cape to Cape Track within the department and can be contacted on (08) 9752 1677.

Track information can be obtained by contacting the Busselton office of the Department of Conservation and Land Management on (08) 9752 1677, or by writing to Ms Jane Scott, President of the Friends of the Cape to Cape Track Inc., c/o Witchcliffe Post Office, Witchcliffe, WA 6286.

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Thirteen years in the making, the Cape to Cape Track offers a unique view of WA's most popular national park. See page 28.



Karijini's new visitor centre provides a cultural and environmental focus point for visitors. See 'Karijini Calling' on page 10.



Dirk Hartog Island is our largest island. It has a fascinating history and a valuable biodiversity. Find out why on page 17.



Does the delicate work of Western Australia's botanical artists have a place in the high-tech world of science? See page 23.



'Landscape at the Heart' is an account of the first LANDSCOPE Expedition to the Carnarvon Range at the edge of the Little Sandy Desert. See page 40.

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COVER

Aboriginal names have always been part of Australia's history, and many of the well known names for Australian animals are in common use today. 'Ancient animals, ancient names' (page 35) makes a case for adopting more Aboriginal names for our native mammals. The brush-tailed phascogale, for example, was known to Nyoongar people as the 'wambenga'.

Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky



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