



A new state-of-the-art interpretive centre will help visitors to Shark Bay understand the immense historical and natural importance of the region.

by Carolyn Thomson-Dans

Showcasing

The new and imposing Shark Bay Interpretive Centre, built on the Denham foreshore at a cost of more than \$8 million, is set to become one of Western Australia's cultural icons.

Shark Bay has long been known for its friendly dolphins and natural beauty. The area's World Heritage listing recognises its internationally significant natural values, but these values are not necessarily easily understood by the 150,000 visitors who descend on the area every year. As a result, the designers of the centre tried to relate World Heritage values in a meaningful way to human use of the unique and scientifically important region.



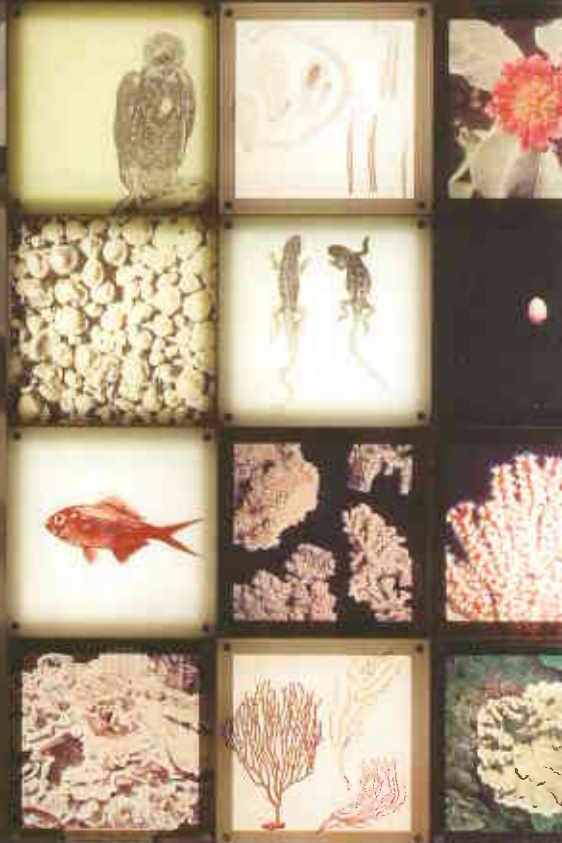
"It is a great place to totally immerse yourself in the history and natural heritage of the Shark Bay region," Kelvin Matthews of the Shire of Shark Bay said. "Every time I come in here I notice something different."

Upon entering the new centre,

visitors will see an amazing map of the World Heritage Area on the floor, created by an etching in the concrete. Features of the topography give the impression of relief, and seasonal currents and their direction are marked in the ocean.

Astounding images and videos from some of Australia's best landscape and wildlife photographers illustrate the region's many and various World Heritage values. As you move through the centre, there are interactive computers on which you may search for information on Shark Bay, including some of the early maps of the region.

Features in the main room are



Shark Bay

organised in the same alignment as their geographical position in Shark Bay. Important historical relics from the early Dutch, English and French explorers are on display. For instance, you can see the figurehead of the *Gudrun*, wrecked in Shark Bay in 1901, and replicas of artefacts such as the pewter plate of Dirk Hartog, which marked the first recorded European landing in Australia.

Two booths run continuous video footage of local characters and people who work in Shark Bay. This means that visitors can sit quietly and listen to interesting identities such as Darren Capewell, who runs Indigenous

heritage tours at Monkey Mia, Hugh Edwards and Phillip Playford, who both had a hand in discovering the cultural and natural heritage of the area. There is also footage of renowned scientists, such as seagrass expert Di Walker, who expound the unique features of the region's natural plants and animals.

The Shark Bay Interpretive Centre was built with a \$5 million State government grant from the Department of Local Government and Regional Development, \$590,000 from the Commonwealth government's Midwest Gascoyne Area Consultative Committee, a contribution of around

Main This expansive view of part of the Shark Bay Interpretive Centre shows some of the display material and one of the audiovisual viewing areas.

Inset top Interactive computer screens enable visitors to search for information.

Inset above Wildflowers and native animals, both terrestrial and marine, are showcased at the centre.

Photos – John Gollings



Above A huge and detailed map that shows topography and oceanic currents is etched on the concrete floor near the entry point.

Left Some of the early collections and illustrations by naturalists make a striking display when backlit.

Below left The Shark Bay Interpretive Centre will enrich the experiences of visitors to Shark Bay.
Photos – John Gollings



\$500,000 from the Shire of Shark Bay, \$100,000 from the Department of Transport and Regional Services and about \$27,000 from the Gascoyne Development Commission. A Commonwealth grant of \$1 million from the Department of Environment and Heritage funded the development of interpretive material and the internal fit-out of interpretive displays. The Shire of Shark Bay will run the centre.

The final result is a tribute to the persistence of Shire of Shark Bay Council President Les Moss, who canvassed both the State and Commonwealth governments to secure such a substantial amount of funding for the centre.

Sydney-based company Freeman Ryan Design—also responsible for the Canberra Museum, the Canberra War Museum and Powerhouse Museum in Sydney—were responsible for the interpretive design and content of the centre, while architect John Nichols of Woodhead International designed the building.

The building also incorporates a temporary exhibition space funded by a \$475,000 grant from Lotterywest.

The Shark Bay Interpretive Centre is an ideal place to visit when you first arrive in Shark Bay and perhaps to revisit again before you leave, once you have spent time in the area and gained a deeper appreciation of it. It will enrich your experience of this amazing place.

Carolyn Thomson-Dans is a long time editor and writer for *LANDSCOPE* and CALM's other saleable publications. She can be contacted on (08) 9389 8644 or via email (carolynt@calm.wa.gov.au).

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