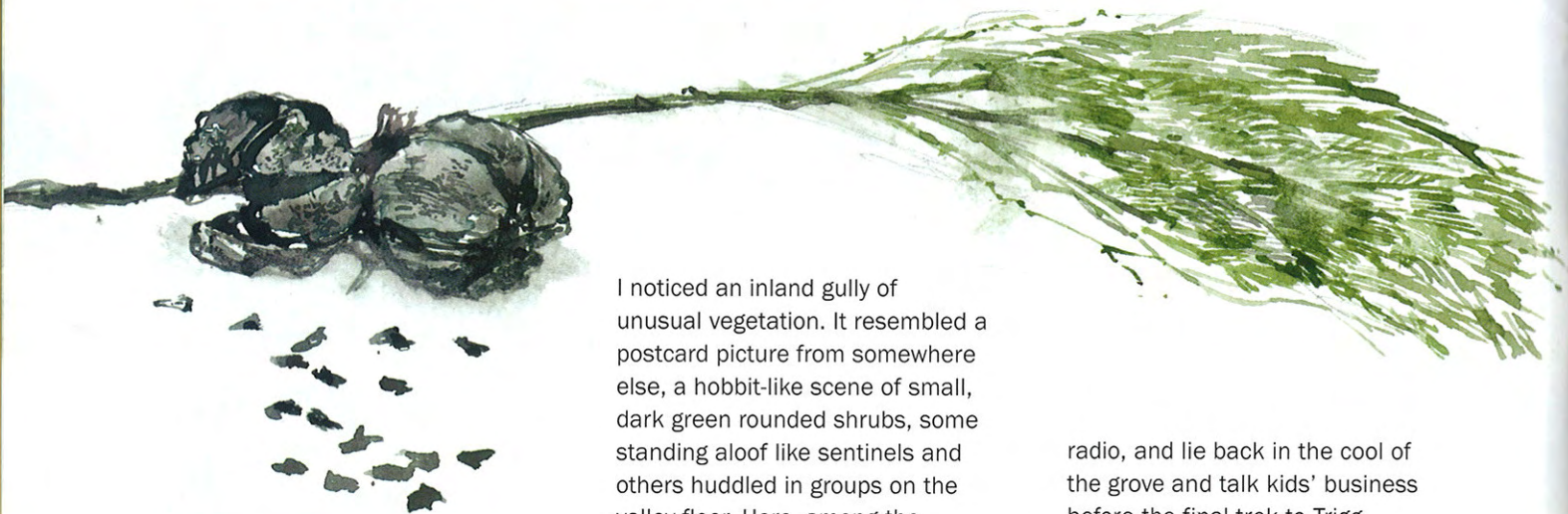


# urban antics

by John Hunter



## Christmas Tree Gully...

There's a 1957 song that starts: "If you're fond of sand dunes and salty air, quaint little villages here and there..." and it was so apt for those who lived in Perth's western beach suburbs in those days.

That era was a fun time of unsophisticated adolescence. There were not many people, not much traffic and no weekend restrictions. The world was our bowl of cherries and all we needed was a greased-up chain on our bikes and access to anybody's front garden tap when peddling to the beach got tough in the heat of summer.

In those days, the main beaches from Cottesloe to Trigg Island were separated by large tracts of bush with no road or path along the coast, so if we rode down to Scarborough and decided the waves could be better north or south, then it was quicker to run or walk the coast. It was on these forays to Trigg that we always stopped off for a rest and chat at our little secluded piece of the planet we named 'Christmas Tree Gully'.

From the beach, you could only see inland to the huge primary dunes but, one time while athletics training through those dunes,

I noticed an inland gully of unusual vegetation. It resembled a postcard picture from somewhere else, a hobbit-like scene of small, dark green rounded shrubs, some standing aloof like sentinels and others huddled in groups on the valley floor. Here, among the few large tuarts and grey-green saltbush, they looked like very conspicuous alien castaways in a secluded hideaway.

These trees were *Callitris preissii*—a native cypress sometimes called Rottneest Island pine or sand cypress. The dense and fine, rich green foliage of these pines is similar to that of cultivated conifers and, typical of their habitat, they were growing in dry limy soils and tolerating the relentless battering of salt-laden afternoon sea breezes. The trees here were quite thick and rounded with a spreading form, probably to help combat hot easterly winds followed by the rugged but cooling south-westerly 'Fremantle Doctor'.

The colour and shape of these cypresses enhanced the appeal of this dune valley and gave it a 'garden' feel. It was a place to shelter, turn on your transistor

radio, and lie back in the cool of the grove and talk kids' business before the final trek to Trigg.

Over the course of time, many places in the suburbs that were the revered haven of children and even older folk have disappeared due to development. It is important for us all to keep our government bodies and local councils informed of the existence of special places and species in our neighborhoods.

The existence today of Trigg Bushland as one such special place has resulted in Christmas Tree Gully still being there as it was all those years ago. Now a stone's throw from suburban houses and just a kilometre from the rock 'n' roll echoes of the Scarborough Snake Pit, it still features its unique Rottneest Island pines. You should go there sometime and hear the whispers of the wind and ghostly mutterings of children through the cypress. Shhh... Elvis, is that you?

### DID YOU KNOW?

- Rottneest Island pine and Rottneest teatree are part of a threatened ecological community.
- Rottneest Island pine has leaves only about three millimetres long. They are pressed closely together against the stem.
- Rottneest Island pine was named when first observed on Rottneest Island by botanist Cunningham in 1822. It is killed very easily by fire.
- Today, Rottneest Island pine occurs only from Trigg to Woodman Point, on Rottneest and Garden islands and in a few remaining stands along the Swan River in Peppermint Grove.



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