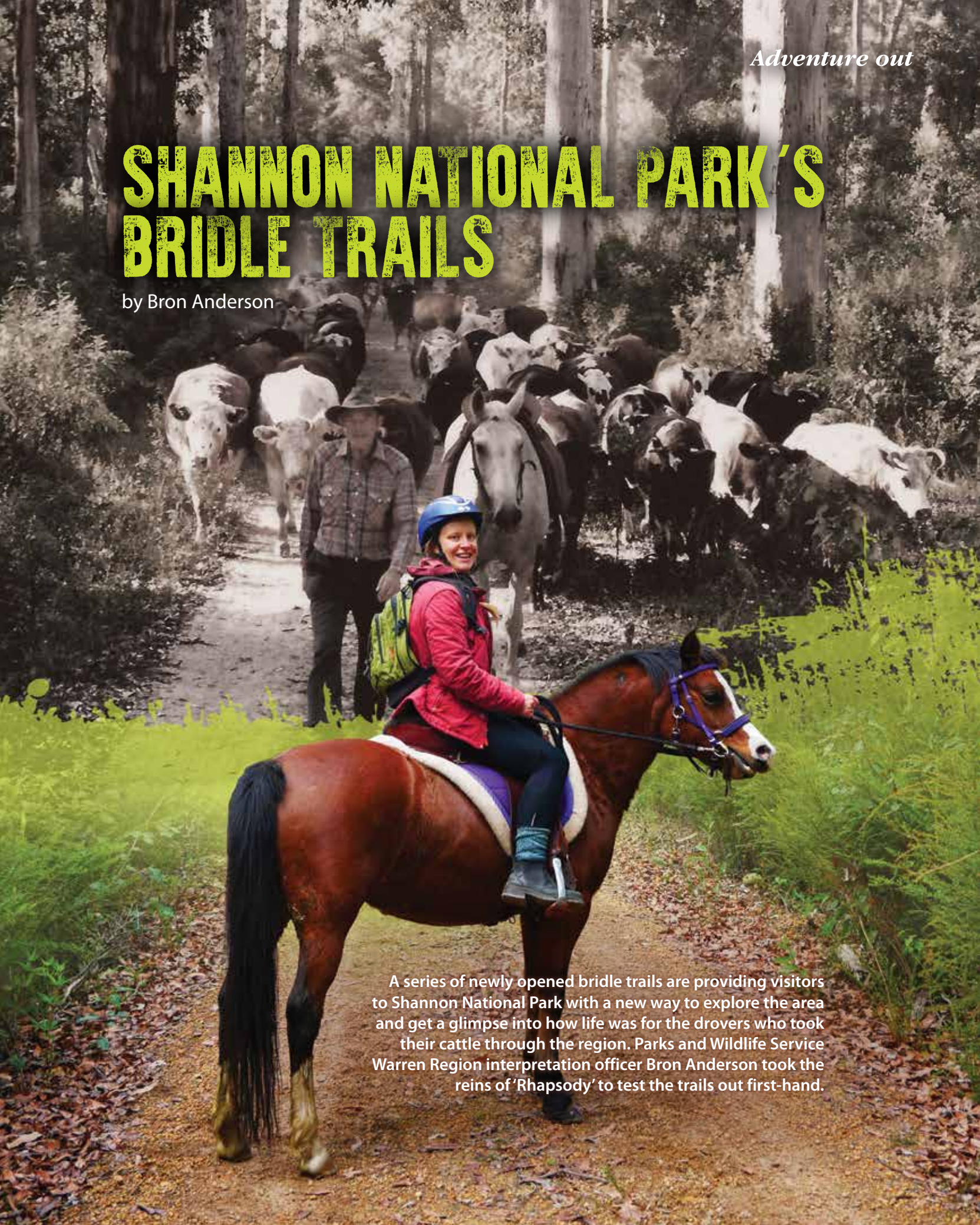


Adventure out

SHANNON NATIONAL PARK'S BRIDLE TRAILS

by Bron Anderson

A woman wearing a red jacket, blue helmet, and a green backpack is riding a brown horse on a dirt trail. In the background, a herd of cattle is being moved along the same trail, with another person standing nearby. The scene is set in a wooded area with tall trees and green grass.

A series of newly opened bridle trails are providing visitors to Shannon National Park with a new way to explore the area and get a glimpse into how life was for the drovers who took their cattle through the region. Parks and Wildlife Service Warren Region interpretation officer Bron Anderson took the reins of 'Rhapsody' to test the trails out first-hand.



Former residents of the Shannon Mill townsite may remember the great excitement of seeing the drovers and their cattle pass through the area that is now Shannon National Park. Maybe they recall the rattle of the timbers as the cattle crossed the bridge over the Shannon River, or remember when the drovers let the town kids have a ride of their horses. Perhaps they were even part of the contingent of children who followed the parade of cattle up the road.

Thirty years after Shannon was declared a national park, the sound of horses' hooves can again be heard clip-clopping along the forest floor on three bridle trails that opened in May 2019.

ALL ABOARD

I hadn't been on a horse since I was a child, so I was apprehensive about taking up the reins. But an offer from local horsewoman Tracey Lynn to lend me a horse and be my guide for the day was too good to pass up. So, with images of drovers in my mind and the ghosts of yesteryear spurring me on, I saddled up on 'Rhapsody' to explore Shannon National Park on horseback on one of the new trails.

The trails all start and finish at the Shannon Horse Camp, which is on the road into the Shannon Campground.

From here, you can choose to take the seven-kilometre Showpony Circuit, the 17-kilometre Cowbells Loop or the 20-kilometre Saddlebags Trail. Each trail passes through a variety of vegetation types, including tall karri forest and drier jarrah and marri forest. The Saddlebags Trail also journeys through low-lying swampy heathland.

The first thing that struck me as we set off on Cowbells Loop, was how much better the view was from high up on Rhapsody's back. The first section of all three trails passes through a tract of karri forest that I've walked many times before. Usually I can only see tree trunks and a wall of karri, but from my new vantage point, I could see the undulation of the landscape, which would be spectacular in spring.

When we first set off, the forest seemed quiet. But soon my ears became attuned to the sounds of the horses' hooves crunching on the gravel track, the breeze through the trees and the chorus of birds. It was incredibly peaceful.

We crossed the Shannon River and headed uphill into more open jarrah forest. I was just beginning to relax into Rhapsody's gentle rocking and was happily taking in my surroundings, when Tracey suggested that we trot. Trotting is certainly easier said than done, and I bounced

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Background The area is steeped in history from when it was used by drovers as a thoroughfare to the south coast.

Foreground Bron Anderson explores the Cowbells Loop with 'Rhapsody'.

Photos – Erin Graham (background) and Tracey Lynn

Above left and right Droving cattle to the coast for summer grazing was a way of life for many farming families.

Photos – Erin Graham (L) and Muir family (R)

around like a piece of popcorn in a pan until I managed to find my rhythm about two kilometres before the end of the ride.

HORSEY HISTORY

The Shannon area has a long association with horse riding. Droving cattle to the coast started in about 1860 and continued until the latter half of the twentieth century. Droving as many as 300 cattle to the coast on horseback for summer grazing was a way of life for many farming families who took up freehold and leasehold properties on the south coast. The natural grasses and creepers sustained livestock and the State Government regulated the use of bushland areas by granting grazing leases. Then, when the first rains of winter arrived to replenish the farms, the cattle would be brought home – just in time for calving.

The local roads that pass Shannon National Park, such as Wheatley Coast and Deeside Coast roads, are former droving routes. But, as forested areas

“Visitors can camp with their horses and take their time exploring the area ... [and] there's plenty of room to spread out and relax in at the end of a day of riding.”

- Sealed road
- Unsealed road
- - - 4WD track
- Connecting walk paths
- Showpony Circuit (7km)
- Cowbells Loop (17km)
- Saddlebags Trail (20km)
- - - Warren Blackwood Stock Route
- Horseyard
- 🐾 Water for horses
- ℹ Information
- 🚻 Toilets
- 🚿 Showers
- 🍖 Sheltered gas barbecue
- 🚪 Gates
- 🏠 Shannon Lodge



Above Shannon Horse Camp allows visitors to camp with their horses and take their time exploring the area.

Photo – Tim Foley/DBCA

Right The three trails provide a range of vegetation types to enjoy.

Photo – Bron Anderson/DBCA

were developed, and traffic increased, droving on the highways became more difficult.

A change in government policy in the late 1970s signalled the end of the droving era. Restrictions on how farmers could manage their coastal land and the protection of large areas of land for conservation reduced access to the coast. Then, in the 1980s, many of the remaining pastoral leases were cancelled.

EQUINE ENVIRONMENT

In addition to the three bridle trails, DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service has opened the Shannon Horse Camp so

visitors can camp with their horses and take their time exploring the area. Horse yards, compost bays, a tap and hitching rails are provided at the camp, and toilets and showers are a short walk away at the main campground. There's plenty of room to spread out and relax at the end of a day of riding.

This campground provides the perfect place to stage horse riding events. The Bannister Downs Dairy Shannon National Park Endurance Ride was held at Shannon Horse Camp in May 2019. More than 80 horses, their riders and support crews took part in the event and the campground accommodated everyone nicely.

I couldn't wipe the smile off my face as Tracey and I rode back to the campground. Riding through Shannon National Park was spectacular and gave me a totally different perspective of the landscape than I've ever got from walking or driving. I thought about the experience a lot the next day, thanks to my aching muscles, but it's one I'll remember forever.



Do it yourself

Where is it? Shannon National Park is 33 kilometres east-north-east of Northcliffe and 53 kilometres from Pemberton and Manjimup.

Park facilities: Information, toilets and showers, barbecues, campgrounds and horse yards, compost bays and hitching rails.

For more information about Shannon National Park, visit exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au. For more information about the bridle trails, visit trailswa.com.au/trails/shannon-national-park-bridal-trails.