



*Walking in a
wildflower wonderland*



A new 26-kilometre loop walk trail in Lesueur National Park offers hikers the chance to get up close to a dazzling array of blooms.

by Samille Mitchell

The rays of the rising sun are spilling over nearby hills, casting the grasstrees and eucalypts in varying hues of gold.

Nearby, I hear yawns from my fellow hikers as they emerge from their tiny tents, swathed in bulky layers against the morning cold.

We've had a poor night's sleep in the bush (turns out those hiking mattresses are not as comfy as they looked in the ads) and yet we feel so happy to be here, alone, breathing in air that feels alive with a symphony of bird song.

Each of us has done plenty of long day walks in the past and camped with cars and swags but this is our first 'proper' overnight hike.

Here at the half-way point on the two-day Yonga Walk Trail in Lesueur National Park we're feeling sore, but pretty darn happy with ourselves for making it this far.

Main Pink-flowered hakea (*Hakea neurophylla*).

Inset Pine banksia (*Banksia tricuspis*).

Photos – Jiri Lochman

Left Hikers along Yonga Walk Trail.

Below Views of Yonga Walk Trail.

Photos – Samille Mitchell/DBCA





Yonga Walk Trail is a new class 4, 26-kilometre loop hiking trail that winds through the country of the Yued people in one of the most flora-rich regions in Western Australia. Even before peak wildflower season, the trail is adorned in a garden of wildflowers in all their riotous colours and designs.

We've clambered high above the surrounding countryside on breakaway ridges, sometimes spotting kangaroos bounding into the bush.

And we've descended deep into tree-lined valleys in which Carnaby's black-cockatoos, galahs and corellas have kept us entertained with their charismatic calls.

But if there's one thing that makes this walk stand out, it's the plants.

The different landscapes harbour different plants, including many that grow nowhere else in the world. They eke out a life in niches and microclimates hidden within the ever-changing landscapes.

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This part of the park also harbours relic species of plants that have survived within small vestiges of refugia as the climate dried over millions of years causing the once-dominant rainforest flora to retreat. It's amazing to walk under species like laterite mallee (*Eucalyptus lateritica*) and Mt Lesueur mallee (*Eucalyptus suberea*) and imagine the same species existing here in wetter, ancient times.

SETTING OUT

We set out on the trail late morning from Lesueur National Park's Drummond car park. At the start, the trail follows shorter walks, which come with interpretive signage explaining natural features.

After some misreading of early signs, we realised we needed to simply follow the trail markers to leave the shorter walks and venture further afield on the Yonga Trail.

You can choose to walk in either direction—we chose the longer 14-kilometre section on our first day and arrived at the campsite about 4pm.

I don't know if it was just that we were sore from lugging heavy packs but arriving at the campsite felt like a welcoming warm hug.

We'd booked online to secure the sheltered camp facility—a three-sided shelter on a raised platform with stunning views over a bushland valley below. The shelter's orientation means it captures the light of both the sunset and sunrise, and a picnic table and chairs out the front offer just the right spot to soak up the natural beauty. It provides enough room for four people.

Nearby, three open, raised platforms sleeping up to five people each, and tables, offer other campers a place to pitch a tent or roll out a sleeping bag.

Even though we had the 'luxury' of the shelter, we decided to pitch tents inside to help stay warm. And as the night descended and the stars emerged, we were happy for the extra warmth.

Before going to bed, we whipped up a meal and got a ridiculous amount of delight from using our hiker-friendly gas burner and collapsible kettle and tucking into our dehydrated meal—just add hot water and voilà—a vegetarian stir fry and chicken risotto appeared.



Above left Views along Yonga Walk Trail.

Above Yonga Walk Trail camp facilities.
Photos – Samille Mitchell/DBCA

Left Lesueur isopogon (*Isopogon sphaerocephalus* subsp. *lesueurensis*).
Photo – Marie Lochman

Do it yourself

Where is it? Yonga Walk Trail is within Lesueur National Park, 20 kilometres north-east of Jurien Bay and 250 kilometres north of Perth. The walk leaves from Drummond carpark.

How to book: Bookings can be made at parkstay.dbca.wa.gov.au for overnight shelters and platforms. The campsite is located 12 kilometres or 14 kilometres into the walk, depending which way you travel. Camping is only allowed in the shelter and, on the platforms provided.

Tips: Best walked in late winter or spring to witness the wildflowers and avoid the extreme summer heat.



Discover more about the Yonga Walk Trail

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.



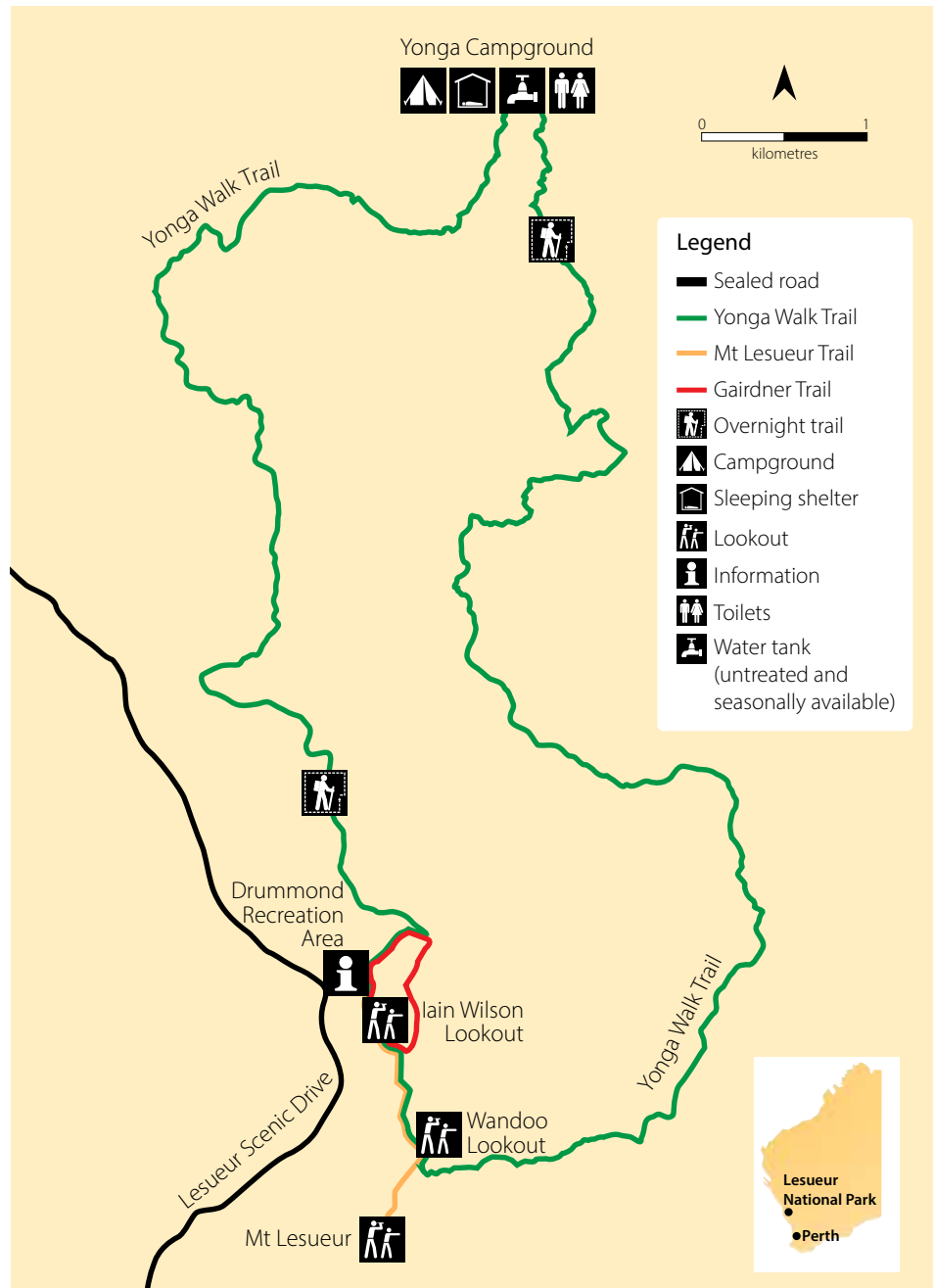
Nearby, an untreated rainwater tank provided water to boil, while wonderfully clean toilet facilities prevented the need to use the shovels we'd brought for a bush loo.

HOMEWARD BOUND

Next morning, we left camp, feeling a lot older and sorer than our spritely selves of yesterday and worrying how we'll fare making the next 12 kilometres with heavy packs.

But once we got walking, we found our groove and were again amazed by the diversity of landscapes.

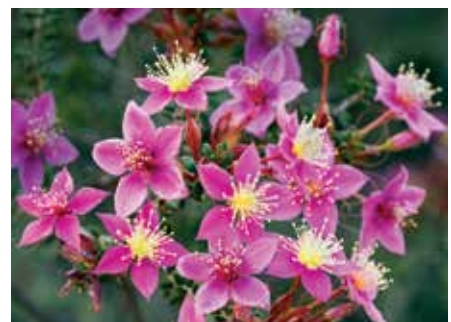
Another misreading of signs near the end of the walk added another couple



of kilometres—a brutal addition at this late stage—but by the time we reached the carpark we were chuffed, high-fiving and raving to passers-by about this highly enjoyable nature escape.

Top Carnaby's black-cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus latirostris*).
Photo – Jiri Lochman

Right Pink summer starflower (*Calytrix fraseri*).
Photo – David Bettini



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