



Adventuring

the Great Southern

Western Australia's Great Southern region is an area of significant natural beauty and plans are underway to provide for and support trail development and enhancement, to protect environmental and cultural values and to offer outdoor recreational opportunities for visitors and trail enthusiasts.

by Mike Wood





The Great Southern region of Western Australia is known for its tall forests in the west, spectacular Southern Ocean vistas, protected inlets and waterways, and bright white beaches. The region stretches from near Walpole in the west to beyond Bremer Bay in the east and inland to the broad-acre farming area around Nyabing.

It has a rich cultural heritage and strong connections for the Traditional Owners, the Menang people. The area also has a rich colonial history as Albany is nationally and regionally significant as the site of Western Australia's first European settlement and has a strong military heritage as the departing port for the ANZAC fleet.

The Great Southern Adventure Trails (GSAT) project began in 2020 focusing on the unique forests and coastal landscapes of the Great Southern and is working towards developing the area as a paddle, trail running, walking and cycling adventure destination, with significant progress already made.

Porongurup National Park

The granite outcrops of the Porongurup National Park rise 670 metres above sea level and about 500 metres

“In Noongar language, Porongurup means ‘totem’. The rocks and hills here are home to all totem spirits, sacred for all time. The Menang people never named individual peaks, they saw them as a collective, one stone.”

above the surrounding farmlands. The Range has an undulating terrain like huge, grey towers that have emerged out of the ground.

As you draw close to the peaks that dominate the skyline, and the 12 kilometres of distinctive granite domes, it is easy to imagine how the Traditional Owners of the land, the Menang people of the Noongar nation, viewed them as a place of great spirituality filled with important stories.

In Noongar language, Porongurup means ‘totem’. The rocks and hills here are home to all totem spirits, sacred for all time. The Menang people never named individual peaks, they saw them as a collective, one stone. The Porongurups is a sacred and holy place, the place of the totemic spirits.

The Porongurup National Park is part of the south west biodiversity hotspot and is listed on the Commonwealth National Heritage List under the Australian Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)*, which protects Australia's most valued natural, indigenous and historic heritage sites.

To help people appreciate and enjoy the park, and to protect park values from increasing popularity, the existing

Discover more about improvements at Castle Rock

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

Previous page

Main Castle Rock Skywalk, Porongurup National Park.

Inset centre Cultural engagement days were held onsite with the Traditional Owners.

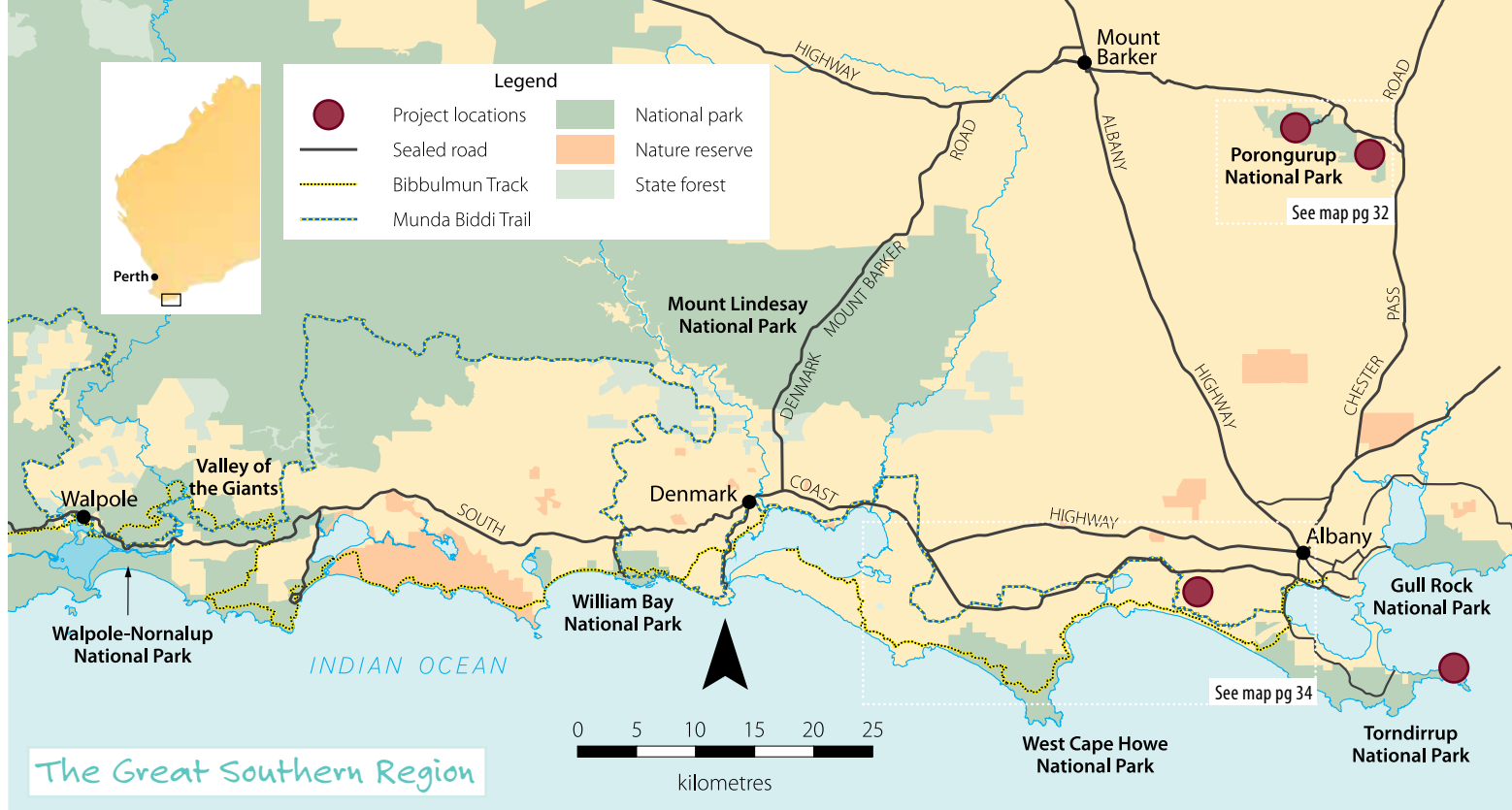
Inset right Bald Head Walk Trail, Torndirrup National Park.

Photos – Samille Mitchell/DBCA

Above View to Nancy and Hayward Peaks from Devil's Slide, Porongurup National Park.
Photo – Marie Lochman

walk trails in the Porongurups have been receiving significant upgrades over the past year, as part of the WA Recovery Plan delivered by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA).

Stakeholders from local businesses, Traditional Owners, the Shire of Plantagenet, Friends groups, trail users, and DBCA staff, identified opportunities to improve trails and public amenities and all contributed to the development the Porongurup National Park Trail Master Plan.



Above New steps at Castle Rock.
Photo – Cliff Winfield



Right New balustrading and platform at the base of the ladder, Castle Rock.
Photo – Samille Mitchell/DBCA

CASTLE ROCK

The very popular 4.7-kilometre-return Castle Rock Trail is at the north-eastern end of Porongurup National Park. With its impressive, suspended steel walkway, the Granite Skywalk and Lookout, Castle Rock Trail was the first project to receive attention.

The impressive 736 new stone steps created by Kim Taylor and his team from KMT Contracting are complemented by more than 150 additional drains that were installed along the trail to improve the

drainage and get water off the trail surface. The steps have been skillfully built, using locally sourced stone, giving the impression they have been in place for decades.

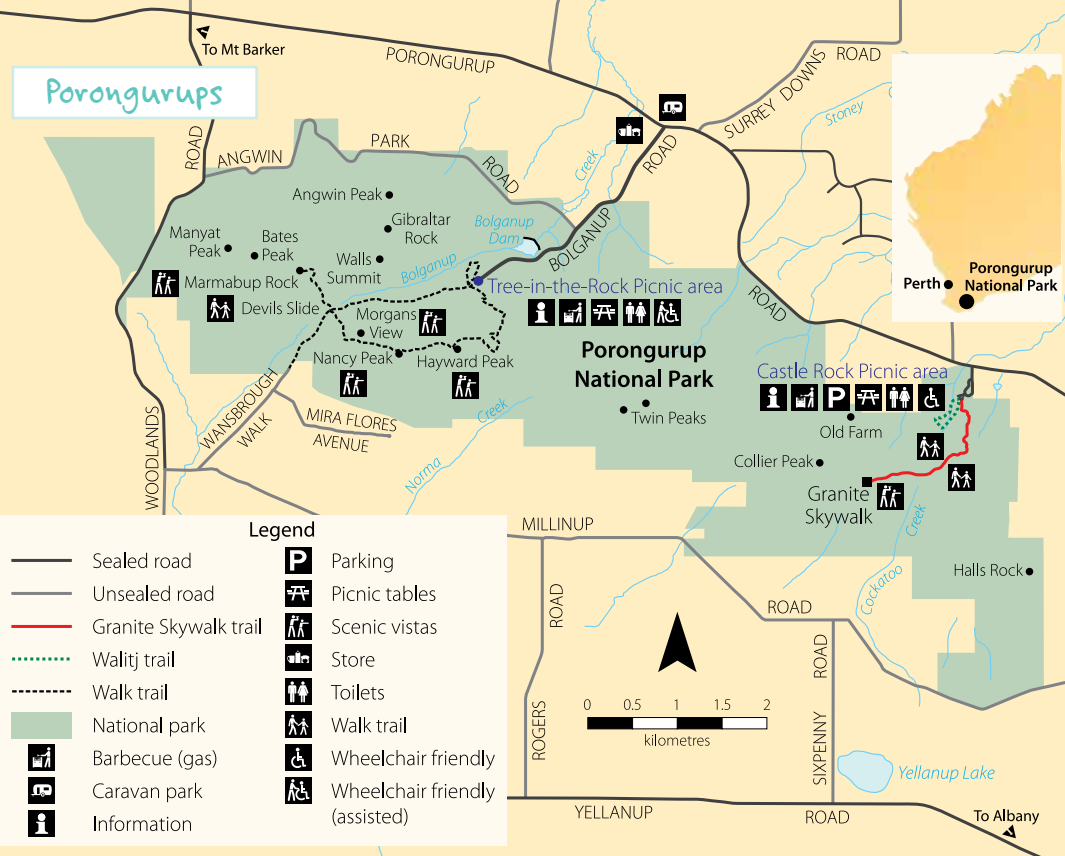
Starting at the Castle Rock picnic area, walkers climb through jarrah, marri and karri forest, past the fascinating Balancing Rock to the base of Castle Rock and the lower lookout.

The Castle Rock trail is now so popular that queues form to climb to the Granite Skywalk during peak times like school holidays. The six-metre steel ladder ascending to the upper Granite Skywalk

has proved very popular with agile visitors. The addition of balustrading and a platform at the base of the ladder has improved the safety for waiting climbers and offers additional views past the rock and of the Stirling Range to the north.

Those not wishing to squeeze up the ladder can walk around to a similar, but lower lookout for panoramic views over the surrounding countryside and of the Skywalk above.

DBCA's landscape architects were tasked with improving the flow of foot traffic to the entrance to the Granite



Above Trail through cut karri.

Above right Helicopters are used to access challenging areas.
Photos – Jarred Pedro/DBCA

Skywalk and to improve the safety of those waiting to ascend the Skywalk.

In addition to the new platform structure at the top of Castle Rock, their designs also included an increase in car parking at the picnic area. There have also been upgrades and improvements to the interpretive signage, particularly recognising the Traditional Owners of the area and improved linkages to the trails.

TREE IN THE ROCK, NANCY PEAK AND DEVILS SLIDE

Work has now begun on trails at the western end of Porongurup National Park, focusing on the Tree in the Rock day-use area and the trails that are accessed from there.

Cultural engagement days have been held onsite with the Traditional Owners so that regional land managers can better understand how to celebrate and protect the cultural values of the site. This knowledge guides the design of facilities for visitors and encourages better communication and engagement with the community. Upgrading and improvement of the site includes increased car parking capacity and picnic facilities in the Tree in the Rock area, improved trail alignments to reduce walking on the slippery granite,

and improved trail sustainability. These improvements will encourage more visitors to this part of the park, reducing pressure on the popular Castle Rock area.

DBCA's landscape architects have also prepared plans to refurbish the existing toilet block, providing accessibility and improving circulation and ventilation. New barbecue shelters and picnic facilities, including signage and interpretation, will be constructed as well as an accessible pathway network within the site. The designs have been developed considering the proximity to the Water Corporation's water protection requirements and Traditional Owner feedback and stories.

Work on the Nancy Peak trail began in June 2022, with approximately 630 stone steps being completed by the team at KMT Contracting. The steps are built in a way that reduces the width of the trail footprint and prevents widening from walkers using the sides of the trail. There have also been some small realignments to take the trail off steep granite outcrops to better protect the delicate mosses and lichens.

The bridge and boardwalk to Devils Slide will receive some maintenance with an upgrade to the existing timber structure and improved fixings. There will



Far left Footings and tools, Bald Head Walk Trail.

Left Fibreglass-reinforced panels.

Above Timber duckboards being installed at Bald Head Walk Trail.

Photos – Jarred Pedro/DBCA

also be erosion control work undertaken on the trail.

It is a very exciting time for those who like to walk in this unique part of the world. With these improvements to the trails in the Porongurups it will mean more people will be able to appreciate the beauty and tranquillity of the forest and understand its environmental and cultural significance.

Torndirrup National Park

BALD HEAD WALK TRAIL

The Bald Head Walk Trail is a 12.5 kilometre return trail and the premier trail experience within the Torndirrup National Park that experienced over 509,000 visits in 2021-22 (see *Adventure Out* on page 35).

Funding from the WA Recovery Plan has enabled DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service to complete extensive trail renewal and coastal protection works on the Bald Head Walk Trail.

Work completed earlier in 2022 included the stabilisation of sand dunes, erosion control measures and surface treatments to timber duckboards on the first sections of the trail between the car park and Isthmus Hill.

Additional rehabilitation and erosion control work to the trail were undertaken following the construction of fibreglass-reinforced stairs, walkways and boardwalks. The trail remained open to the Isthmus Hill lookout while work was underway with some short, half day closures to ensure public safety during helicopter lifts for materials delivery.

The bulk of the work on the Bald Head Walk Trail was the construction of the new steps, walkways and boardwalks on the existing alignment, undertaken by Terpstra Construction and overseen and managed by DBCA Project Manager, Jarred Pedro.

After months of planning, packaging up helicopter sling bags full of construction materials including fibreglass-reinforced panels and stringers, timber sleepers, fastenings and construction tools, the helicopter operations started in March 2022 from the nearby Jimmy Newell's carpark with 80 airlifts completed.

The Terpstra Construction team that included two local Menang men, began to prepare the footings with good weather allowing the team to drop more loads onto the track. Approximately 290 lifts were completed by Goodwin McCarthy Helicopters, including 40 loads

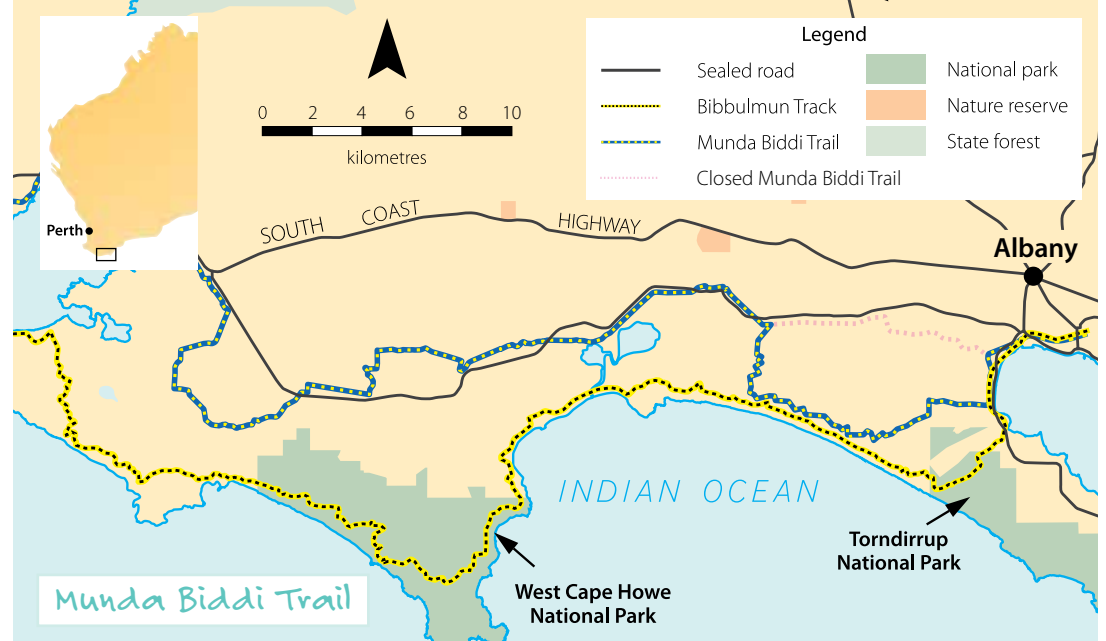
for erosion control works at the end of the trail.

One of the main issues the team needed to repair were the depressions and cuttings that had been created over time as walkers trudged over fragile sand dunes, carving the trail surface so deep that it was sometimes up to shoulder height.

The upgraded Bald Head Walk Trail is proving to be popular with almost 3000 people enjoying the walk in the first month since re-opening in mid-December 2022. Work has focussed on ensuring the sustainability of the trail and surrounding environment. The improvement works now encourage walkers to stay on the trail and not walk off the side, creating braided and widening trails that damage the fragile vegetation. The new steps and boardwalks will reduce erosion and deepening of the trail surface.

Walkers will notice the use of coir matting, which is made from sustainable coconut fibre under and surrounding the trail. The coir matting prevents erosion of the sand from water and wind and helps to retain soil moisture, facilitates seed retention and helps to reduce foot traffic on the fragile sides of the trail.

The pins that pierce the coir matting and hold it to the earth are bio-gripper,



biodegradable pins made from potato starch.

The construction of a new toilet and the development of a new asphalt car park are also underway in 2023.

Visitors to nearby Misery Beach, voted the 'best beach in Australia' in 2021 by Tourism Australia, will also notice that the beach access and pathway have been improved. New roadworks will further improve access and parking, including sealing the Misery Beach car park.

Munda Biddi Trail

ALBANY WINDFARM REALIGNMENT

Cycle trails on the south coast have also received some attention. The William Bay cycle trail was completed last year, planning work continues for the

Wilderness Ocean Walk (WOW) stage 2 trail near Denmark and the realignment of the Munda Biddi Trail, past the Albany Windfarm, was completed just before Christmas 2022.

The new 21-kilometre Munda Biddi Trail realignment through the Windfarm provides sweeping views over the coastline as well as the spectacle of the massive wind turbines. It required construction of 4.1 kilometres of new, surfaced, single track within the Sandpatch Reserve and construction of an elevated platform to traverse a wetland section.

The new alignment takes riders off the Lower Denmark Road, and was built with minimal disturbance and protects the habitat of the vulnerable Main's assassin spider and a water production bore zone.

The next time you are in Albany make the time to ride your bike along this

new section of the Munda Biddi Trail past the massive wind turbines and enjoy the spectacular coastal views.

The trails work being undertaken in the Great Southern will encourage more visitors to spend time and invest in the region and help to better protect the fragile south coast environment. Aboriginal culture and stories will be a feature of trail interpretation to enrich visitors' experience when they explore the amazing South Coast.

Above left Albany windfarm.

Below left Boardwalk over fragile wetlands on the Munda Biddi Trail.

Below Castle Rock stone stairs.
Photos – Clinton Hull/DBCA



Mike Wood is a Communications and Community Engagement officer within DBCA's Parks and Wildlife Service. He is the former Chair of the Bibbulmun Track Foundation, a current Board Member of the Foundation and a keen trail user. Mike can be contacted at (08) 9219 8254 or mike.wood@dbca.wa.gov.au

Up to date information on trail projects in WA can be found at projects.trails.wa.com.au or explore.parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/connect.