

Adventure out

Bald Head

Walk Trail

by **Charlie Pierce**



Charlie Pierce has been walking the length of the Flinders Peninsula for almost five decades. Recently, joined by his wife, children and grandchildren, he enjoyed the spectacular scenery of the Bald Head Walk Trail along the pristine southern coast of Western Australia.



I set off on the Bald Head Walk Trail with the usual sense of anticipation for perhaps the thirty-first time! I've been experiencing the delights of this 13-kilometre round trip walk along the Flinders Peninsula in Torndirrup National Park for almost five decades—initially just my wife and myself, then later with our two sons as they grew from infancy to adulthood, and now with their wives and children whenever they come down to Albany.

The joy of being at one with the natural world has passed from generation to generation. Our six grandchildren race off along the track, vying with each other to be the leader, and cries of “awesome” fill the air!

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Main top *Banksia praemorsum* and *Isopogon* sp. at Bald Head.

Photo – Damon Annon

Main below Bald Head trailside boulders.

Photo – Cliff Winfield

Inset Three generations reach the final cairn at Bald Head.

Photo – Charlie Pierce

Clockwise from top left Bald Head Walk Trail; Heath *Lechenaultia* (*Lechenaultia tubiflora*).

Photos – Damon Annon; Photo opportunities along Bald Head Walk Trail. Photo – Samille Mitchell/DBCA

Discover more about Bald Head Walk Trail

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



“The joy of being at one with the natural world has passed from generation to generation.”

REWARDING CHALLENGE

The walk, officially termed ‘strenuous’ by the City of Albany, takes walkers over spectacular landforms shaped from ancient granites and gneisses as well as more recent limestones and sandstones, mostly covered in low heath dominated by banksia, woolly bush, mallee and creepers, with rare orchids flourishing in spring and early summer.

There are several challenging climbs, offset by flatter sections along the top of granite domes and around Limestone Head. In recent years, steeper sections of the track have been severely eroded through heavy use and extreme weather events, resulting in an uneven, sandy surface scarred by roots and boulders, particularly in the limestone areas.

Yet, during 2022, new sections of pathway—either fibre-reinforced

polymer or jarrah duckboarding—have been painstakingly constructed over these sections, and now the trail is both environment- and user-friendly.

OFF WE GO

The trek starts at a carpark at the base of Isthmus Hill, but just as I am lulled by the comfort of gentle slopes and the fascinating flora around me, the gradient suddenly increases and, somewhat breathlessly, I reach the bare granite surface at the top, marvelling at how safely this primeval rock holds me in its grasp.

I look back to Salmon Holes, where intrepid fishermen are but dots on shining sands, and absorb the last signs of human influence that I’ll see on the walk—Goode Beach, where we now live, Albany’s



Trail grading

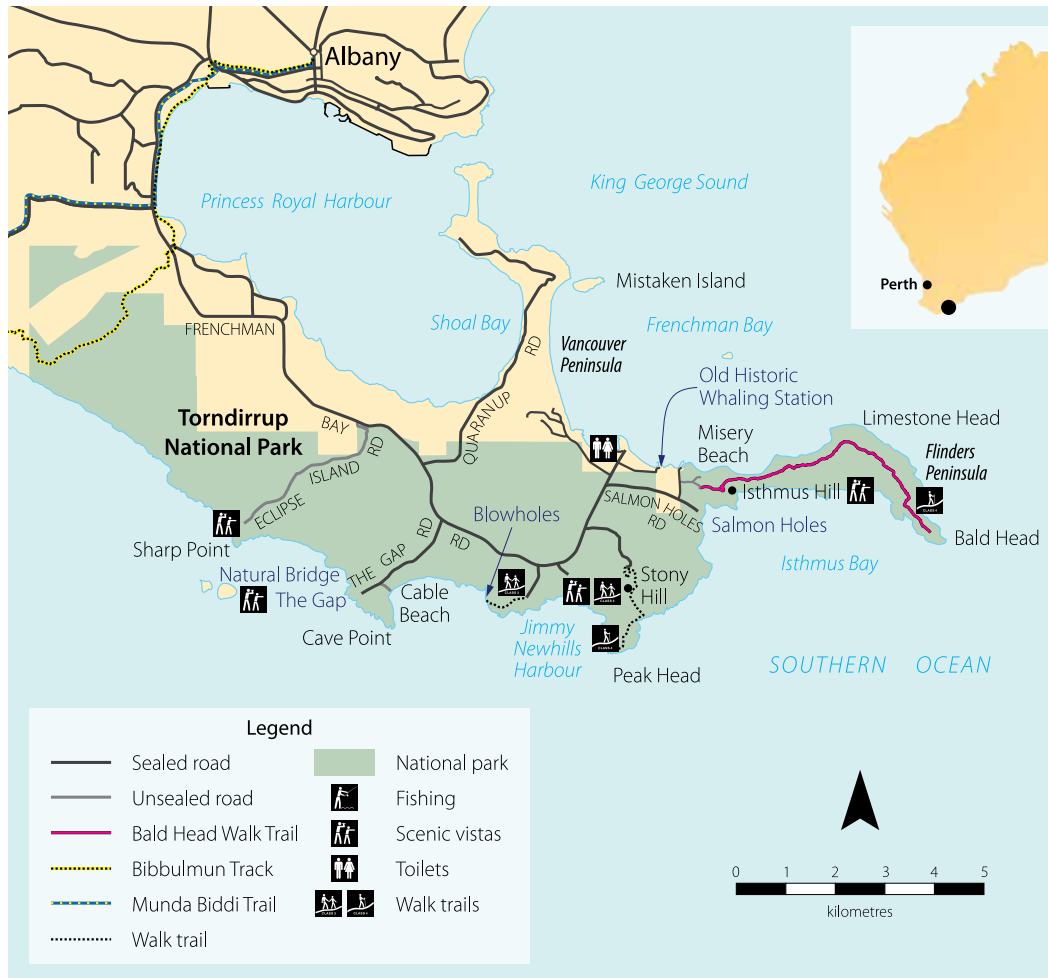
Parks and Wildlife Service walk trails are assigned a 'class' to indicate degree of difficulty.



Class 3 indicates a moderate walk trail with clear directional signage. You may encounter minor natural hazards such as short, steep sections; steps; shallow water crossings; and unstable or slippery surfaces. A reasonable level of fitness is recommended.



Class 4 indicates a walk trail with limited directional signage and difficult sections. You may encounter natural hazards such as long steep sections; water crossings; and unstable or slippery surfaces. A good level of fitness and bushwalking experience is recommended.



historic whaling station and Discovery Bay Wildlife Park.

Then, unexpectedly, I turn a corner to find the vista of the whole Flinders Peninsula before me, with Bald Head resplendent at the end. Descending into the isthmus, I'm struck by the contrast between the churning seas of the Southern Ocean on my right and the relative calm of King George Sound, with its azure water and alluring inlets, on my left.

Another steep climb through rugged limestone topography takes me to the high plateau leading to Limestone Head—the

highest peak in the Albany area. In the middle of the path is a huge, fossilised coral polyp; a reminder that once this plateau was an underwater reef.

Soon I'm at the col, a dip in the profile of Limestone Head that always provides an excuse for a refreshment stop. From here, Bald Head looks tantalisingly close and there are spectacular views of Seal, Breaksea and Michaelmas islands in the Sound, and beyond of mountains. Manypeaks and Gardner, as well as the Porongurups and if clear, the Stirling Range. In winter months, it's exciting to glimpse dolphins and whales.

Onward from the col, our path traces the north side of the peninsula, passing through leafy glades and always with breathtaking views of the sea, islands and mountains beyond. On one previous occasion, a massive kangaroo hopped out directly in front of me and proceeded to jump jauntily along the path into the

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Top Fibreglass-reinforced walkways minimise erosion.

Photo – Cliff Winfield

Below Walkers of all ages enjoy the trail.

Photo – Damon Annison





distance. Over another granite outcrop there is no defined track, but we move from one cairn to another, and finally to the highest point on our route that lies adjacent to the rounded summit of Limestone Head.

Abruptly, we descend through a lunar-like landscape of desert sand and jagged rocks, with Bald Head luring us forward, and then stride over another glorious windswept outcrop of granite and granodiorite etched in sinuous patterns of pink, orange and black. To the right, the relentless Southern Ocean has carved dramatic patterns along the coast over hundreds of millions of years, and I am humbled by the natural forces at work.

UNBROKEN OCEAN

Soon it is time to traverse a steep scarp that leads down to the final approach to Bald Head. On previous visits, erosion of the sandy track into a deep gully meant that it was easier to descend by sliding down on one's backside, but now there is the new fibre-reinforced polymer staircase to use! At the bottom, I continue along the root-strewn trail past weathered boulders and silicified branches

until I climb again on to the huge granite dome that is Bald Head itself.

Finally, we approach the cairn marking the end of our outward trek. Again, there is that sense of wonder. Before us is unbroken ocean until Antarctica. Behind is the magnificent scenery that will accompany our return. Oh, to linger! But time is passing, and it will take another three hours' walk to get back to the finishing point.

As we head westwards towards the setting sun, I reflect that despite tired limbs and sore feet, the exhilaration of this amazing walk means that I'll do it again and again until infirmity sets in. The beauty, grandeur and challenge of the adventure has an appeal that reaches across the generations.

Clockwise from top Stunning coastline and cliffs. Photo – Samille Mitchell/DBCA; Expansive views along the trail; Showy Dryandra (*Banksia formosa*). Photos – Damon Annison; Happy faces at the conclusion of the walk. Photo – Charlie Pierce

Do it yourself

Where is it? Bald Head Walk Trail is in Torndirrup National Park off Murray Road, 10 kilometres south of Albany or 430 kilometres south-east of Perth.

How long is it? 12.5 kilometre return walk, taking on average five to seven hours to complete.

Safety information: Bushwalking experience is recommended. Directional signage may be limited. Terrain is steep and difficult in sections. Do not attempt to return via the beaches due to unseen hazards. Be careful on the granite sections and around the edges as the cliffs are quite steep, instead please stay on the trail. Be prepared for changing weather conditions and ensure you are appropriately prepared with sufficient food, water, first aid.

Nearest Parks and Wildlife Service office: Albany office, 120 Albany Highway, Centennial Park, WA 6330 (08) 9842 4500



Charlie Pierce is an avid bush walker, living for many years in Vanuatu and now in Albany. He can be contacted at charliepierce19@gmail.com