

Australia's Amazing South West Corner

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The iconic drive along the Great South West Edge is the trip of a lifetime with plenty to interest both the geo-tourist and the nature lover.

The Great South West Edge National Landscape is a collaboration between tourism, community and conservation that aims to attract both Australian and international tourists to the beautiful south-west of Western Australia. Its focus is the iconic drive along the Great South West Edge (GSWE) of Australia's largest state by area – a journey of between 700 and 750 kms, depending on the actual route taken, linking destinations from Bunbury to Esperance (or vice versa). It includes numerous untouched coastal vistas, ancient geology and swathes of natural bushland. This scenic drive can be completed in several days, a couple of weeks or even take months.

The area's geology is dominated by the giant Yilgarn Craton which dating suggests was formed some 2.94 and 2.63 billion years ago by the accretion of existing blocks of continental crust, most of which are thought to have been formed between 3.2 and 2.8 billion years ago. The regional geology

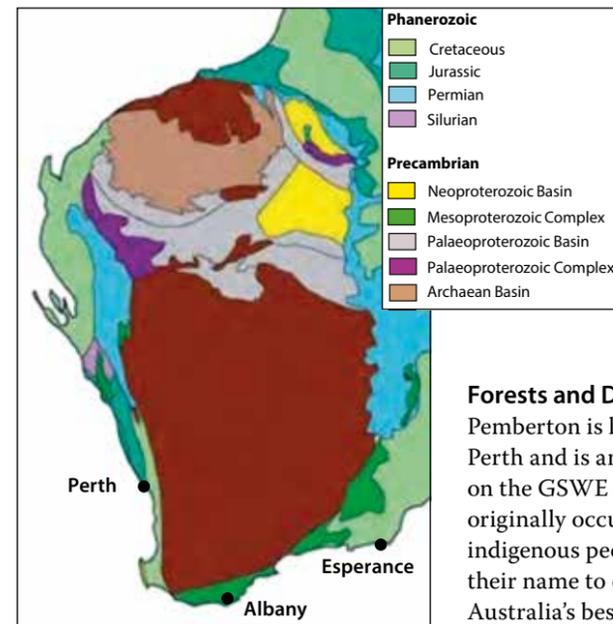
is typified by the widespread granite and granodiorite intrusions that make up over 70% of the craton. In addition there is evidence of extensive basalt and komatiite volcanism as well as regional metamorphism and deformation. The Yilgarn Craton also has extensive gold mineralisation which has led to the area being designated the Goldfields-Esperance region.

Surfing Beaches and Vineyards

An amazing place to begin the GSWE drive is in the lovely city of Perth and there is no better place in the city to begin than in Kings Park. This is a magnificent park and botanical garden, 400 hectares in area, overlooking Perth Water and the Swan River and with magnificent views of the Darling Range in the distance. The park contains many examples of native and imported flora and fauna as well as the state war memorial dedicated to those who gave their lives in World Wars I and II. It is easy to spend an entire day here

enjoying the peaceful surroundings and having a taste of some of the experiences awaiting on your upcoming adventure.

Around 175 km south of Perth and a suggested first stop on the GSWE drive is the city of Bunbury, located on the Leschenault Estuary. The original inhabitants were the indigenous Noongar people who named the town Goomburrup, prior to the colonists' arrival around 1830. It is known locally as the 'city of three waters', with excellent surfing on the Indian Ocean to enjoy as well as the calmer environments of Koombana Bay and the estuary itself. As you can imagine, water sports dominate leisure time here, but also worth a visit are the Leschenault mangroves. These 25,000-year-old trees can be seen on trails and from the viewing platform at the Big Swamp Reserve. A nearby site of geological interest is the basalt along Bunbury's Back Beach at Wyalup Rocky Point. Wyalup means 'a place of



climate of hot dry summers and warm wet winters create ideal grape-growing conditions. The soils are a deep, well-drained red gravelly loam that, together with the ideal climate, allow for some exceptional wines to be produced.

Forests and Dunes

Pemberton is located 335 km south of Perth and is another suggested stop on the GSWE drive. The region was originally occupied by the Bibbulum indigenous peoples, who also gave their name to one of South Western Australia's best-known tourist attractions – the Bibbulum Track. This is one of the world's most famous long-distance walking trails, and in its entirety stretches around 1,000 km, from Kalamunda in the Perth Hills to Albany on the south coast. The track is for walkers only and passes through karri and tingle forests, coastal heathlands and several national parks. This is an adventure in its own right as the entire walk takes between six and eight weeks to complete, although many people will only walk some shorter parts of the track at any given time to enjoy its abundant wildlife and scenery.

mourning' and was an ancient Noongar burial site. The basalt is around 130 million years old and is part of the Kerguelen igneous province that formed some 130 to 95 million years ago as Australia, India and Antarctica split apart.

The second stop on the GSWE drive, around 220 km south of Perth, might be the lovely old town of Busselton, famous for its pier, thought to be the longest timber-piled jetty in the southern hemisphere. Located on the Indian Ocean, Busselton has beautiful white sand beaches where once again water sports are the main leisure and vacation pursuits. Busselton is also known as the gateway to the Margaret River wine region. This is a very popular tourist area and is famous not only for its wine, but also for its surf breaks including Main Break and The Box. Sugarloaf Rock, a large natural granite island in the Indian Ocean, as well as Cape Naturaliste where it is located, are both worth a visit.

The Margaret River area has many excellent wineries, and it is possible to spend several days in this area and not visit them all by any means. The Mediterranean

In addition to walking part of the Bibbulum Track, there are many other things to see and do in this area, not least of which is a visit to the Gloucester National Park and the Gloucester Tree. This giant karri tree is 58m high and is reputed to be the world's second tallest fire-lookout tree, the tallest being the nearby Dave Evans Bicentennial Tree. Visitors can climb up to a viewing platform in its upper branches from where they will have superb views of the surrounding karri forest. Karri trees are eucalypt trees native to this area and have the Latin name *Eucalyptus diversicolor*.

If you have the time, then another interesting place to visit is the Yeagarup Sand Dunes, located in the D'Entrecasteaux National Park just 28 km south of Pemberton. Here the Warren Dune chronosequence comprises three dune systems with the youngest up to 7,000 years old and the oldest up to 2 million years old. A four-wheel drive vehicle can be hired to drive on the dunes or simply enjoy the beach. This is an experience that is not quite unique to Western Australia, but is certainly well worth the effort for a fun day trip out of Pemberton.

The Rainbow Coast

Just over 400 km south of Perth is the town of Walpole, located on the

Path in a karri tree forest in western Australia



Elephant Rocks near Albany on the south-west coast of Australia.

Dianne Tompkins

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The dramatic granite coastline near Albany.

Walpole River. The town is part of what is known as the Rainbow Coast, which includes Albany, Denmark and Walpole, several national parks and reserves, many pristine white sand beaches, ancient forests with giant trees and includes parts of the Bibbulum Walking Track. Whales and whale-watching are popular with both tourists and locals as they enjoy this scenic and beautiful area.

Leaving Walpole and about a 30-minute drive from the town is the world's longest and highest tree-top walk at 600m in length and 40m high. From here you can see the forest canopy including giant tingle and karri trees. Nearby Mandalay Bay is just one of many white sand beaches where it is possible to relax and also enjoy the view of Chatham Island in the distance.

About 15 km west of the town of Denmark, in the William Bay National Park, are Elephant Rocks and Elephant Cove, so named because, from several angles included from the air, these giant granite boulders look like a herd of elephants paddling in the shallow water. Close to Elephant Rocks is Green's Pool, a popular swimming and snorkelling location where fish and coral can be seen on the inner side of the rock breaks.

Albany, also on the Rainbow Coast, is around 420 km south-east of Perth and is the oldest colonial settlement in Western Australia, predating both Perth and Fremantle by over two years. It was founded on 26 December 1826 and was originally called Frederick Town. It is also known as the gateway to the Goldfields owing to its deepwater port and proximity to the Eastern gold-mining towns. The rugged coastline, settler and convict history and the National

The pink Lake Hillier: the colouration is due to algae and salinity.



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A panoramic view of the coast and typical white sand beach close to Denmark.

Anzac Centre all make this a wonderful place to stay and explore for a few days. Albany was the last port of call for troopships leaving for the First World War, and this and much more is well documented in the National Anzac Centre located in town.

The penultimate stop on the GSWE drive might be Hopetoun, located around 590 km from Perth. This town and its port once thrived when it supported the nearby Ravensthorpe nickel mine in addition to several other nearby mining operations. The Ravensthorpe Mine was originally owned and operated by BHP Billiton but is now placed in 'care and maintenance' by the current owners, First Quantum

Minerals. The nickel is contained in Cretaceous to Middle Tertiary lateritic clay minerals such as goethite, limonite and serpentine. The bedrock source is serpentine-talc-magnesite rocks, serpentinised dunite and serpentinised peridotite.

Trip of a Lifetime

The final destination on the GSWE drive is Esperance, which is around 700 km east-south-east of Perth. Esperance has many white sand beaches, but perhaps the most famous is Lucky Bay with its archipelago of some 110 islands and resident kangaroo population. In the middle of this archipelago is Lake Hillier, one of Western Australia's

famous pink lakes. The pink colour is due to the combination of high salinity and the presence of the algae *Dunaliella salina* which thrives in this type of environment. Sadly, the lake is now less pink than it was previously owing to changes in salinity largely brought about by human interference in this unique natural environment.

Completing the GSWE drive is truly an experience of a lifetime and will create lasting memories of this amazingly beautiful landscape, as well as good times enjoying some fabulous Margaret River wines in some of Australia's most memorable settings.

References available online. ■

Part of the Great South West Edge drive near Esperance.



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