

## **WELCOME TO THE WORUMBA EXPERIENCE**

### **A brief description of the journey from Hawker to Worumba across the Willow Plains**

When you leave Hawker on the old dirt road to Cradock, you pass the hospital, which was built as a memorial to the men who served in the Great War of 1914–1918.

At first you won't see much of Worumba. You won't yet see the hills that will fill your eyes and senses for the better part of the next four or five hours. Worumba is hidden at this point by a great whale of a hill known as Windy Hill. This is the start of the Druid Range, which slants away to the northeast and forms the western boundary of Willow Plains.

Go on until you have reached 7 km from Hawker, and almost immediately after coming out of a creek bed - at the Worumba HS-Willow Waters sign post - take a sharp left turn and travel east across the Willow Plains. This road takes you past homesteads and ruins established by the farmers of the 1870s and 80s. The Strangways Act (1869) opened up what had been large grazing holdings to small farmers. After a few years and dry times the cropping farmers drifted away, and their properties were bought by graziers. The country has responded well to the sustainable grazing that is carried on now in the area.

Ahead of you will be the jagged outline of Mt. Craig and the looming bulk of Mt. Plantagenet, the central pivot of the tour around Worumba. You will wander through the lovely and interesting Willow Waters Gorge following the Willow Creek, which you will cross at least twelve times in the course of your tour. In the gorge off to the right of the road and you will see the Willow Waters Weir, which was built in the late 1800s by early mining explorers. Later the water behind the weir was piped down to the flats of Willow Plains to water the stock of the Shinnick families. Continuous flooding through the gorge filled in the weir with dirt and aided the road to be put in this way in the 40's.

In the Willow Creek you can see remains of the party telephone line that was maintained by the property owners until 1988. A single channel analog radio system phone is used at Worumba now.

Once through the gorge you come to the Worumba boundary gate. Just to the left of this, a section of the original dog (dingo) fence has been preserved. Jagged Mt. Craig disappears off to the left as the road gently skirts around the southern base of Mt. Plantagenet. Mallee scrub gives way to wattle and spinifex as you approach the Homestead, where you will commence the numbered part of your drive.

## **A BRIEF HISTORY OF WORUMBA**

In the 1880s large holdings such as Holowilena, Arkaba and Kanyaka surrounded what became Worumba. At that time, this steep and rugged area was infested with dingos, and it was a sort of no-man's land, only used by an occasional shepherd as he brought flocks to graze.

Prospectors roamed the hills seeking gold and other metals, but without significant success.

Timber cutters appeared to take out accessible stands of native pines for fence posts, which were sent as far south as Jamestown. Red gums were harvested to provide sleepers for the transcontinental railway line, which was opened in 1917.

The Shinnick families settled on the flats just outside Willow Water Gorge. From here they ventured into the rugged terrain of Worumba to cut wood and to graze their animals. For many years they used their skills as cattlemen, teamsters and woodcutters in the Worumba area, before it became a pastoral lease. The abundance of trees on the north side of Mt. Plantagenet brought in other woodcutters and teamsters from afar.

Worumba was consolidated into a Pastoral Lease in 1919 and allotted to Murray Howard, who was a returned soldier from the Great War (World War I). He and his neighbors erected a dog-proof fence to make the area safe for sheep. Murray Howard built a homestead (which is gone now) and the woolshed which is still used.

The Dearlove family bought Worumba from Murray Howard in 1927. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Brian Dearlove built the present homestead. He also established the orchard east of the house, in which his original orange and fig trees continue to flourish and fruit abundantly in testimony to his vision. Brian had a tragic fatal horseback accident, as a result of which in 1956 ownership shifted to the Shute and Clarke families. The Clarke family took over the Lease in 1958 and are the present owners.

Worumba is considered a small Pastoral Lease of 170 square kilometers (48,000 acres) with an annual rainfall of 300 mm (12 inches). The property is centered around Mt. Plantagenet, which has an elevation of 3,114 feet [949 meters] and on a clear day can be seen easily from Quorn.

## STARTING THE WORUMBA TRACK

Getting started on the track begins at the Homestead where you will get this info and a gate **Key**. (Be sure and ask to see the Homestead ART Gallery if you are interested.)

### **Signpost 1 - 0 Km:**

At the top of the homestead yard/race set your odometer on zero and proceed ahead on the track to the right to the bore water tank.

### **Signpost 2 - 0.2 Km: House paddock/Bore water Tank**

Turn left at the arrow and proceed to the gate at the corner of the paddock. *Remember that this is a working property. Proceed with caution at all times, as sheep are often on the move or being worked.*

### **Signpost 3 - 0.5 Km: Gate CLOSE THE GATE**

Along this track you will continue criss crossing the Willow Creek. Further on you will notice new growth of River Red gums as a result of the Big Wet in the 1970s. The clumps of trees will thin out as new floods come down the creeks. Drought will take its toll on other trees.

### **Signpost 4 - 2.6 Km: Station Paddock Look Out**

At this sign turn right up the hill and continue to the top of the hill for a vista of the rolling country of the Station Paddock. Over the top of the homestead can be seen the pointed Devil's Peak of Quorn and over the woolshed is Mt. Plantagenet. There will be a close turning radius at the top of the hill. Return to signpost 4 and continue along the main track.

### **Signpost 5 - 6.4 Km: The Knob Bore Yard CLOSE THE SECOND GATE**

*Proceed through the yards with caution. Gates are very important so (1) Shut the second gate (2) Leave the first open unless it is shut on arrival.*

If we are working sheep, stop and discuss with us how to get through the yards.

The shorter of the two windmills at the yards is for pumping water out of the Knob Bore. The taller windmill is used to pump water up the pipeline for 3 kilometers to what is known as the Top Bore. The Knob Bore delivers water to four different paddocks and fills seven watering troughs. It has never been known to fail, even in severe drought. The windmills need constant monitoring. If they fail the consequences can be serious for both native and domestic animals. The increased number of watering points on pastoral properties has had a great influence on the numbers of native animals in the area. Old timers say that 60 years ago it was a rarity to see a kangaroo in the district and it was talked about with some excitement.

Continue through yard and past second arrow towards and through the mallee scrub

### **Sign post 6 - 7.3 Km: Eagle Hawk Dam (not visible just yet)**

Over the spinifex to the left is a small shallow dam put in a few years ago to catch water run off from the road. The Dam has become a favorite habitat for wedge-tail eagles in the summer months and for ducks in the winter months. In the summer it is common to see 10 to 30 wedge-tails flying off as you pass by.

From a point 100 metres ahead of the sign post, the small dam can be seen if you look sharply back to your left.

A fire went through this area in 2005 with some gum trees lost forever and with some mallee tress coming back fresher than ever.

### **Signpost 7 - 7.7 Km: The Watershed**

As you take the left fork you are now driving along the watershed of a small dividing range. Surprisingly, the water to the right of the road flows to Lake Torrens and the water to the left of the road flows to Lake Frome.

### **Signpost 8 - 9.1 km: Spinifex Country Turn right at this post.**

For the next few miles you will be driving over high plateau country with rolling hills covered in spinifex. In the spring, the wheat-like seed at the top of the spinifex is very good feed for both sheep and cattle. When it is in full seed it is a grand sight as it waves in the wind.

### **Signpost 9 - 13.2Km: Big Paddock Use Keys Here CLOSE GATE**

You have now entered the "Big Paddock" of approximately 20,000 acres. Wethers are kept in this paddock, and we only muster here once a year due to the rough terrain.

### **Signpost 10 - 13.9 Km: Golden Wattle Gorge**

***Check wheels are engaged for 4WD, which is now essential both for your own safety and the sake of the track.***

In the springtime this gorge dances with the golden wattles. Recent dry years have seen a decline in the wattles here.

### **Signpost 11 - 14.3 Km: Yacca Lookout Panorama extraordinaire**

This is the highest point along this route. A short walk or drive to the left through the prickly spinifex and jagged rocks will reward you with a spectacular eagle's eye view of the Flinders Ranges. To your left is a close up view of Mt. Plantagenet and the pointed Devil's Peak and then the Elder Range and Wilpena Pound straight in front of you.

For the rest of the journey, you will be driving through the trees below you - various bands of Mallee and Pine woodlands.

### **Signpost 12 - 15 Km: Native Pine**

A lightning bolt might have struck the native pine to the right of you years ago. Some lightning strikes scatter the trees into toothpick size pieces. Lightning strikes are one of the main causes of bush fires in the ranges.

### **Signpost 13 - 15.8 Km: New generation pine forest**

Descending steeply through a section of old and new growth pine, you are about to experience Mary's Folly, a tranquil hidden creek bed, where the wind whispers quietly through the pines, followed by a steep ascent.

The new generation pine forests sometime start their growth when the older trees are starting to die. The lack of cut stumps in this area indicates virgin wood lands, which the early woodcutters never reached.

### **Signpost 14 - 16.3 Km: Semi permanent spring**

The water level at this very small spring, as the name suggests, fluctuates with the seasons. This spring marked the end of the woodcutters' road as they made their way into the wooded areas from the west.

Keep an eye out in the old timber area for two different types of stumps - the early axe-chopped ones and the later straight-cut sawn ones.

As you travel through this pine forest you might let your imagination roam and try to feel what it would have been like for the early wood cutters, with their wagons and drays, provisions and horses - living weeks on end in this isolated environment.

### **Signpost 15 - 18.3 Km: Abandoned Wood cutters' bore**

This bore was plagued with misfortunes and has been left to rest in silence.

The pile of rocks close to the old tank was probably a shepherd's hut, which was never completed. Who knows what story is behind the unfinished job?

This is a good place for a picnic and a stretch. It is also a good area for a bit of bird watching. Sometimes you have to look quietly to see the numerous local species. One bird watcher recorded 32 species in an afternoon's drives through these hills. What is your count?

Having a picnic under a pine tree is much safer than under gum trees, which are notorious for branches breaking off without warning.

### **Signpost 16 - 18.4 Km: Abandoned Wood cutters' bore**

Proceed left across the creek, remembering that ruins like this give an insight into how hard the early pioneers must have worked and without 4WD vehicles or similar modern facilities. The remnants of an old windmill are on your left, and the head machinery is on your right.

### **Signpost 17 - 19.4 Km: Mallee and pine transition zones**

Along this route you see groups of pine and mallee trees giving away to each other, with the lime-loving mallee growing over the calcareous soil.

### **Signpost 18 - 19.7 Km: Termite Mounds**

A small termite mound is seen 20m off to the right and another one will be seen a few metres to the right by the road just before the next creek crossing. They usually occur on top of dead mallee stumps.

### **Signpost 19 - 20 Km: Obsolete sheep yard**

The sheep yard to your left is no longer used now that we have motor bikes for mustering. Until fifteen years ago, we still used horses, but now they have passed into history. Off to the right is a sugar loaf hill.

### **Signpost 20 - 20.3 Km: Mt Plantagenet from afar**

Off to the left another aspect of Mt. Plantagenet can be seen. The tip of Mt Craig is just visible ahead of you over the tops of the trees.

### **Signpost 21 - 22.5 Km: Finlay's Lookout**

If you are ready for another stretch of your legs and a last panoramic view of the ranges, then leave your car near the cairn and walk to the top of this hill. You will see various types of small shrubbery, such as silver wattle, bullock bushes, soap bush, cotton bush, false sandalwood, etc.

### **Signpost 22 - 25.6 Km: Mt Craig View**

To the left you can watch Mt. Craig change its shape as you drive closer and around the base of it. Its jagged peaks will become a stunning feature.

### **Signpost 23 - 26.1 Km: Calcareous Creek bank**

On your left, you can see a good example of weathered calcareous lime-rich sediments, which underlie the mallee scrub throughout this area. These sediments were laid down thousands of millions of years ago.

### **Signpost 24 - 28.2 Km: Old Mineral Prospecting**

Here you will see evidence of exploratory prospecting done at the turn of the twentieth century and then again in the 1960s. No significant profits were ever made from mining this area.

*Please stay on the track.* Do not walk around old exploration digs.

### **Signpost 25 - 30 Km: Boulders**

These large boulders have been shed from Mt Craig (you may not want to tarry!!) Did you see the old shepherd's chimney off to the right?

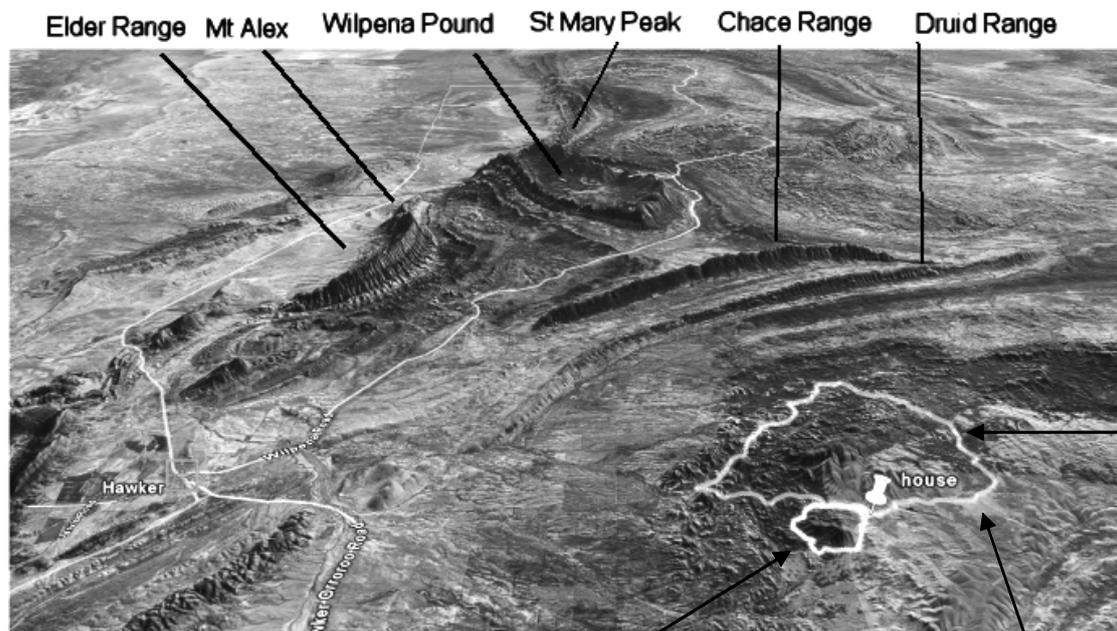
### **Signpost 26 - 31.3 Km: Lock Gate**

You will be following the creek bed and small track until you reach the Willow Waters Gorge Road.

Turn LEFT to the Worumba Homestead.

Turn RIGHT to Hawker

**Don't forget to return the key!**



Mallee Loop Track

Worumba Experience Track

#11 Lookout

Phone reception is available at some elevated locations.

Worumba	86484037
RAA (Teagues Hawker Motors)	86484014

UHF radio - use repeater channel 7