

WELCOME TO THE WORUMBA EXPERIENCE

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.

Continue for approx 7 km 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 part 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.

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A Brief History of Worumba

In the 1880s large holdings such as Holowilena, Arkaba and Kanyaka surrounded what was to become 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 searched for good grazing areas for the stock in his care.

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 and as a result of this ownership shifted to the Shute and Clarke families in 1956. The Clarke family took over the Lease in their own right 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.

Sign post 6 — 7.3 Km Eagle Hawk Dam (not visible just yet)

Over the spinifex to the left is a small shallow dam. Three these dams have been put in the last few years to help with the run off in this area. The Dams 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.

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. In 2017 their numbers seem to be increasing again.

Signpost 11 — 14.3 Km Yacca Lookout — Panorama extraordinaire

This is the highest point along this route. A short drive to the left is a great overall view of the Flinders Ranges. To the west is a view of Mt. Plantagenet. The Elder range and Wilpena Pound is straight in front of you. **(see the mud map)**

For the rest of the journey, you will be driving through various Mallee and Pine forest and dry weather creeks lined with lovely red gums.

Signpost 12 — 15 Km Native Pine

Lightning strikes in these hills are the main cause of fires in this area. To you right is a old dying Native Pine tree. Many times, young pines start growing around an old dying tree, as they are doing here.

Signpost 13 — 15.8 Km New generation pine forest

Descending steeply through a section of old and new growth pine. You will find a tranquil creek bed, where the wind whispers quietly through the pines, followed by a steep ascent.

This is new generation pine forests. The lack of cut stumps in this area indicates virgin wood lands, which the woodcutters in the late 1800s 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. Look for the old cement bags looking like a pile of rocks.

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.

Signpost 17 — 19.4 Km Mallee and pine transition zones

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

Signpost 18 — 19.7 Km Termite Mounds

Small rounded termite mound can usually be seen in this area. They are the silent work horses of this landscape making their mound on top of old dead mallee stumps.

MALLEE PADDOCK LOOP — OPTIONAL

*If you want to add another hour/10Km to your pleasure, then turn right at the dropper with the pink string, which is after the second cattle grid on your return trip to the homestead. **Reset your trip odometer.** The first 4.5 km of this track was part of the original track into the Worumba homestead area as used by the early settlers with their buggies and drays.*

Signpost 1 — 0 km.

Some things to note along the track are the tree stumps left by the early loggers with axes, together with the trees that have died from the stress of the dry years of the early 21st century. The acacia scrubs are dying not so much from the drought but that they are at the end of their natural twenty-year life expectancy cycle. These thorny bushes are good legumes for putting nitrogen into the soil. The seed pods are high in protein and are very good feed for cattle and sheep in dry times. Their November flowering of a soft yellow mass is lovely.

CLOSE THE GATE

Signpost 2 — 1.1 km.

Here you will go through a gate into the Mallee Paddock. The next 3 Km was bulldozed to make a fire break for the lightning strike fires of January 2006, because until then this country was inaccessible. This has reduced some of the appeal of this part of the track, but with a few good years new growth will cover the scars.

Signpost 3 — 4.7 km.

The original track into Worumba was up One Gum Creek from the valley below. From this ridge you can see the hills as far south as Quorn and Carrieton.

Signpost 4 — 4.9 km.

Here you will leave the original track and turn sharply to the left.

Please use your 4WD LOW RANGE. This will help protect the fragile terrain here.

Signpost 5 — 6.6 km.

If you want a last look-out point, go straight up this hill for a panoramic view of Quorn's Devil's Peak and Mt Brown. Then go back to the dropper and continue on to the right to follow this steep creek until the terrain opens up to the view of the Worumba homestead with the massive Mt Plantagenet as a back drop. The large hill on your left was burnt all but bare in the 2006 fire.

At the gates take the left one and proceed down the creek and back to the house to return the keys.

DON'T FORGET TO RETURN THE KEYS!

WE TRUST THAT YOU ENJOYED THE WORUMBA EXPERIENCE