Welcome to the Wilabalangaloo Nature Trail

Your walk meanders through some of the 100 hectares of rich Mallee animal and plant habitat along the one-kilometre river frontage which comprises Wilabalangaloo. Janet Reiners, the daughter of a significant early local photographer, donated the property to the National Trust in 1971 as a flora and fauna reserve. It was originally part of the large grazing property, Cobdogla Station. The name Wilabalangaloo is thought to be derived from an Aboriginal word meaning ‘the place of red, yellow and brown stones’, a link to the colours in the cliffs.

This guide provides some information about the flora, fauna and other features you will see along the Wilabalangaloo Nature Trail.

Trail information

The trail comprises three distinct segments or links, each commencing and finishing at the trailhead. The longest combination of these links is about 2.5 kms and will take about an hour.

Since its formation in 1955 the National Trust of South Australia has established a network of 29 conservation reserves which contain:

- a valuable diversity of plant communities
- significant wildlife habitat
- a number of rare and threatened species and
- sites of geological and Aboriginal significance.

The management of these reserves is overseen by the natural heritage section through a volunteer network and is funded by:

- membership subscriptions to NTSA
- donations and bequests
- State and Australian Government grants and
- sponsorship.

Please do not remove any material from this conservation reserve.

For more information about the Wilabalangaloo Reserve or on becoming a volunteer contact the:

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Based on Dean Lines’ Self Guided Nature Trail sheets and trail modifications developed by Sue & Pat Marshall. The guide has been produced by the National Trust of South Australia, with the help of enthusiastic local community volunteers. National Trust staff and members of the Natural Heritage Advisory Committee, Ideas and Words, photographs by

Dean Lines, design by Peter Tonkin Design.

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The National Trust of South Australia is registered as a charity under the Benevolent Societies Incorporation Act 1973 and is endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient by the Australian Taxation Office. Donations over $2.00 are tax deductible. 

Please do not horse ride or motor vehicle in the reserve area.

The trial is unsuitable for horse riders or motor vehicles.

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1 The Extended Front Garden
Here you can see Lemon-scented Gums (Eucalyptus citriodora), with glossy leaves and grey bark. Their flowers contain citronella oil, a natural insect repellent. They are native to Queensland.

The adjacent large pine is an example of an introduced species, the Aleppo Pine (Pinus halepensis) a popular tree in cultivation and also having a memorial association with Gallipoli as the 'Lone Pine'. This species is also acknowledged as an environmental weed.

Many of these planted species are not well-adapted to local conditions and are unlikely to survive in the long-term.

2 Eucalyptus, Saltbush and Bluebush
Back toward the house, are multiple-trunked Mallee Eucalypts. Two of these species have intertwined. One hybrid has adapted to salt and drought conditions.

Here are two different types of Saltbush. The larger leaved variety is River Saltbush (Atriplex lagadoidea). The smaller, smaller leaved plant is Spinifex Saltbush (Atriplex spinescens). They grow in the understory and have grey/green velvety leaves.

To your right are clumps of Black Bluebush, (Maireana pyramidalis) with short blue-green succulent egg-shaped leaves.

3 The Hut
This hut was built during the 1980s by participants of a mud brick construction course and is surrounded by a variety of native shrubs.

The woody shrubs with narrow flat leaves and forked tips are the Desert Cassia, (Senecio artemisioides). They are very drought resistant. In bloom they have yellow flowers.

The bushy plant close to the hut has short, hard, pointed, pale green leaves that conserve water. The Comb Spider-flower (Grevillea humilis) has clusters of attractive red, tubular flowers when in bloom. Hard, woody capsules bear seeds and sometimes may be seen on the plant.

Variegated Fairy-wrens visit because the Grevillea offers protection from predators. If you hear a high-pitched twittering you may see a blue-headed fairy-wren.

4 Native Cherry and Apricot
The leaves on the bush to the left, the Soft Cherry, (Eucalyptus aprylifolia) are reduced to scales to allow conservation of moisture. The small berries or ‘cherries’ were eaten by Aboriginal people.

The narrow-leaved woody shrub is the Narrow-leaved Hop Bush, (Dodonaea viscosa). When fruiting, it bears pinkish hop-shaped capsules.

Further to the right are Native Apricots, (Pittosporum angustifolium), the fruits of which are inedible. These plants have smooth, pale grey bark and narrow leaves that droop slightly. These small trees appear to die in drought but shoot from the base following good rains.

5 The Living Crust
The track descends to rocky ground covered with pale grey/ green, cone-shaped lichens called cushions.

Lichens shrivel when dry and open with moisture and over time gradually reduce the rock to soil. The mix of lichens and mosses here conserve the meagre water supply and prevent erosion of tops of other plants. Observe the loosely rolled pale green lichen known as Reversion Lichen. You will know why it has earned this name if you pour water over a piece and wait a minute.

Proceed along the path towards the power pole to the next stop.

6 Needle Bushes
Here you see tall shrubs with rigid, grey/yellow, cylindrical leaves with sharp spines at the tip. This is Silver Needlewood, (Hakea laeviscopa), another hardy shrub. In bloom it has clusters of creamy white flowers. Aboriginal people obtained water from its roots.

Nearby is another bush with hard prickly leaves. It is an Acacia known as the ‘Wait a While’ (Acacia cotidifolia). It provides cover for small birds such as Wheate.

7 Drought
Up until the late 1990s the tall, native Southern Cypress-pines (Calliclitis gracilis) were alive and healthy. As you look down to the river, these now dead, skeleton native pines form a stark backdrop to the low-growing blue-bush. Prolonged drought conditions and possibly rising salinity are the culprits.

New seedlings struggle to survive such conditions and persistent grazing by feral rabbits. Heading towards the next stop you will encounter some planted, non-local native trees eg Red-flowering or Large-fruited Blue Gum (Eucalyptus leucoxystis sagegala or \'Rosea\'), a popular 'Australian' landscape species.

8 Native Pine Woodland
Preferring the sandier soils of this arid region are a few surviving native pines (Calliclitis gracilis). The hard durable timber has a resin that repels termites and was used by early settlers to build 'gut and pine' houses.

Also surviving within this relic native pine woodland is the Weeping Eucalyptus (Eucalyptus delegatensis). It is an edible red flower plant but rich in Vitamin C. Smaller specimens are visible further along the track.

The tall reeds (Phragmites australis), lining both sides of the river belong to the grass family.

You may see White-plumed Honeyeaters, small, olive-coloured birds and also Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters with pink beaks.

Follow the riverbank along to the next stop.

10 River Box
The eroded root system of a large River Box tree, (Eucalyptus largiflororum) is visible here, testament to the 'spirit of endurance'. Trees along riverbanks and watercourses can withstand floods through an extensive root system.

In contrast to the River Red Gum, the River Box bark is hard, furrowed and dark grey. They usually grow in slightly drier soils further away from the river bank.

The Willows lining the riverbank were introduced during the paddleboat era and used as 'reflective' markers in lamplight, to indicate the main river channel. They damage the ecology of the river system.

11 The Cliffs
The 3 – 6 million year old sandstones of the cliffs are known as the Parilla and Loxton Sands. The rich red, yellow and brown colours of branchlets while female flowers are clustered in heads with pointed scales at the tip. These small trees appear to die in drought but shoot from the base following good rains.

12 Shell Midden & River Bank
Mullusk shells (Musselus) appear in the exposed soil layer overlaying the Loxton-Parilla sand which forms a section of the river bank. This midden is indicative of early Aboriginal habitation.

Higher up on the bank on this section of trail is a shrub known as the Spiny Fairflower (Scascadia spinescens). In bloom it has cream-coloured, fan-shaped flowers.

13 Rocky Ravine
The sparsely vegetated and stony, skeletal outcrops on one face of the ravine are in stark contrast to the grassy, shrubland community above the track on the opposite side. Can you guess why this is so?

14 The Robbers Cave
Legend has it that the title hit in this cave to escape the law. The actual cave formed as the erosion head cut away the Mallee topsoil and moved under the resistant sandy capping. Over time water dissolved the shells and bones of dead marine creatures of the inland sea and formed the horizontal strata of limestone of the cave walls.

Climb out of the gully towards a stand of Black Oaks on the rise.

15 Sheoaks and Fan Flowers
Here you will see the Black Oak (Allocasuarina pauperc) which are parts of Sheoak and have sectioned branches with pointed tips at the edge of each section. This fine ‘needle foliage’ reduces moisture loss, helping the Black Oak to conserve resources in the mallee climate.

Black Oaks are dioecious, having separate male and female trees. Male trees bear flowers on slender spikes at the ends of branches while female flowers are clustered in heads with small, hard, rough, cone-shaped structures. Black Oaks can also spread by suckering, which is a form of natural cloning. As all these trees are males they are suspected of being genetically identical.

Follow the trail up onto the ridge to see and take advantage of the great upstream and downstream views.

16 The Flood Plain
From here the River Murray floodplain is visible. To the northeast is the small settlement of Lynd and the outskirts of the town of Barrie lie to the south. The cliffs above the river’s edge form the western boundary. This vast floodplain was created as the riverbanks were pushed back by erosion over millions of years.

Overhead you may see Whistling Kites. Continue on around towards the regenerating Mallee woodland.

17 Blue-leaved Mallee
These specimens of Eucalyptus cyanophylla are uncommon and confined to this district.

The species name is given for the conspicuous blue-grey leaves which clearly distinguish it from other mallees growing at Willobilgalango.

18 Mallee
The multi-trunked Mallee Eucalyptus here survive droughts and bush fires. Their extensive roots can access water down to 30 metres.

Leaves are mostly waxy, leathery and narrow which reduces loss of moisture. In times of water shortage indigenous people dug up the roots, cut them into sections and placed them on end in a container, to collect drinking water.

After a Mallee tree has been cut, burnt or knocked down it can regenerate by growing new shoots from its large woody base (lignotuber). Those with the largest lignotubers are hundreds of years old. Old and dead Mallee species is distilled to produce Eucalyptus oil for a range of uses.

Notice the understory plants are mostly small shrubs in the Chondracarpus family, which includes Saltbush and Blue Bush.

19 Land Disturbance
Erosion has accelerated in some parts of Willobilagalango because of land-clearing practices of European settlement and over-grazing by rabbits.

Erosion breaks down the protective crust of mosses and lichens and exposes powdery, fine, dusty sand which gets washed away by rain.

As you take in the vista looking across to the homestead, you will notice the bales of straw that were placed across the old path. This has enabled silt to build up, providing a fertile bed for new seedlings. As you take in the vista looking across to the homestead, you will notice the bales of straw that were placed across the old path. This has enabled silt to build up, providing a fertile bed for new seedlings.