

NULLARBOR EAST TO WEST

A TRAVELLER'S GUIDE



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1. Introduction

Welcome to our guide on travelling and exploring the Nullarbor from east to west. I'm sure you've heard people say the Nullarbor is a monotonous and boring drive. Nothing could be further from the truth.

If you have a few days to spare, your Nullarbor crossing can be an unforgettable experience. There's so much to see and do. You just have to know where to look.

This guide aims to help you discover the wonders of the Nullarbor Plain. Whether it's a short diversion to one of the many caves, whale-watching from dry land or an adventure to the site of nuclear explosions, you won't be disappointed.

I hope you enjoy this guide. For more destinations in Outback Australia, check out our website at www.topwiretraveller.com

Happy travels!

Andrew Murray

P.S. A big thank you to Charlie Murray and Peta Murray for graciously agreeing to let me use their fantastic photos.

The Nullarbor Plain is on Mirning, Ngatjumay, and Malpa Country.

2. Ceduna to Nullarbor Roadhouse S.A.

Leaving Ceduna and heading west – what a feeling! You’re about to cross the Nullarbor – 1,200km of flat, treeless plain... at least, this is the image portrayed in the travel guides.

As you’ll discover, the Nullarbor has a lot to offer. And lots of trees... a little weird, since Nullarbor is Latin for “no trees”.

Firstly, A Word Of Warning

Stock up with food and water before you leave Ceduna.

If you’re simply using the Nullarbor to get from one side of Australia to the other, then don’t worry too much. There’s enough fuel and food stops to make the trip easily... and plenty of traffic if you break down.

But if you’re planning to deviate off the highway and explore, be prepared. This is especially true when you travel with kids. The amount of food they consume is unbelievable!

And summer temperatures can be insanely hot, as we’ve discovered from firsthand experience. It’s difficult to make sandwiches in 46°C heat... instant toast! So, carry water in case you break down.



IT CAN GET HOT ON THE NULLARBOR. ALWAYS CARRY SPARE WATER, JUST IN CASE.

There are few provisions along the Nullarbor. Several roadhouses exist but they stock very little. What they *do* stock doesn't make much sense, eg flavoured UHT milk but no plain UHT milk. Not a criticism, simply an observation.

And remember... heading west, you'll lose all fruit and veggies even honey at the WA border. So you need to consider other food options for the WA border-to-Norseman leg.

The biggest watch-out is water.

Once you leave Ceduna (or Norseman from the west), you won't be able to refill your drinking water anywhere.

Not surprising, but it would be a major drama if you weren't prepared. There's no "proper" grocery store between Ceduna and Norseman, so you can't buy the bulk 10 or 15L bottles along the way.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Let's find out more about Ceduna.

Ceduna, The Beginning Or The End?

The town of Ceduna feels like a staging post, a place to either launch your foray westward across the Nullarbor or to rest up after completing your journey from the west.

It sits on Murat Bay, a wide expanse of water favoured by recreational fishers and the odd yacht. Being wedged between the ocean and the desert, Ceduna cops its fair share of wind. It's a Mecca for keen fishers. Many spend a few months here every year, either fishing off the long jetty in town or launching their tinnies into the choppy waters.

Ceduna's claim to fame? It's the "Oyster Capital of Australia" and holds the Ceduna Oysterfest every year over the October long weekend.

Ceduna has what many consider to be the best oysters in the country. Try them at the [Ceduna Oyster Barn](#), a local institution and an essential stop for lovers of seafood.

The foreshore is brilliant. It has recently been given a facelift and is a popular place for locals and tourists alike. Plus it's the ideal spot to watch the sun setting over Murat Bay and the Ceduna jetty.



THE IMPRESSIVE FORESHORE AND JETTY AT CEDUNA.

The town has full services... a well-stocked grocery store, pharmacy, hardware store, a couple of obliging mechanics workshops and three caravan parks.

We stayed at [Ceduna Foreshore Caravan Park](#), right in town. This popular park has new amenities, pool and camp kitchen. Most impressive! And the people who run the park, Marty and Jodie are friendly, welcoming and super-helpful.

We've also stayed at the [Big 4 Ceduna Tourist Park](#) a couple of times. It's back from the foreshore, but still only a short walk into town. This park has a great camp kitchen and a friendly atmosphere.

So, What's In Store For You?

Leaving Ceduna, the first surprise is wheat crops. They stretch at least 150km west of Ceduna. Wait, isn't this supposed to be the Nullarbor?

Just 71 km west of Ceduna is **Penong** (meaning rocky waterhole). This rural township caters for the wheat and sheep industries, as well as the endless parade of travellers rolling through town.



*ROLLING INTO PENONG FROM THE EAST. PRETTY MUCH THE ENTIRE REGION HAS BEEN CLEARED OF VEGETATION SO FARMERS CAN STAND WHEAT STALKS IN SAND. * SIGH **

Penong's claim to fame? It's home to Australia's biggest windmill. In fact, it could probably also claim to have the most windmills... they're everywhere! Call in a have a look at the Windmill Museum. It really is worth a look, especially if you were brought up on a farm and had a windmill or two.

Penong has a general store, pharmacy and service station.

Ceduna to Penong is an endless expanse of completely cleared cropping country. This marginal country yields wheat, growing in among the paddocks of stone. The scrub along the road verges gives a small hint of how densely this land was vegetated before it was cleared for cropping.

Nundroo is the next stop, 82 km west of Penong. The "town" basically consists of a roadhouse and a mechanic's workshop.



THE ROADHOUSE AT NUNDROO... HALF THE TOWN!

The mechanic comes highly recommended, although we can't personally vouch for him. You'll meet this bloke if you break down on the Nullarbor in South Australia. He's the one who'll turn up with a tilt tray and get you out of trouble!

The seemingly endless wheat country peters out between Penong and Nundroo, with just a couple of last-gasp crops at Nundroo. After Nundroo, you're into quite densely timbered country.

Fowlers Bay

120 km west of Ceduna, turn left off the Eyre Highway to Fowlers Bay. Follow the road for about 23 km until you reach the small town, perched between the beautiful bay and huge white sand dunes. The road from the highway is tar, but becomes dirt about halfway along.

The dunes tower over the town, threatening to engulf it. They are begging to be climbed, so of course we obliged.



THE DIRT SECTION OF ROAD LEADING INTO FOWLERS BAY.



HUGE SAND DUNES LOOM OVER THE VILLAGE.



IT'S A LONG WAY UP!

The bay is a favourite haunt of whales, with its protected water providing respite from the wild Southern Ocean. Not surprisingly, Fowlers Bay is a popular place for whale-watching.

Fowlers Bay has a fascinating history involving one intrepid explorer, whalers and an important port for nearby stations...

Fowlers Bay, Base Camp For An Epic Journey

Edward John Eyre was an explorer. He described the Nullarbor as...

"a hideous anomaly, a blot on the face of Nature, the sort of place one gets into in bad dreams"

... and then decided to walk across it!

From Adelaide to Albany in the searing summer heat, with no clue of whether fresh water existed along the way. I think those early explorers were slightly mad.

In 1840 Eyre, John Baxter and 3 aboriginal guides – Wylie, Cootachah and Neramberein – set off from Adelaide with a plan to walk over 2,000km to Albany.

At the time, Fowlers Bay was a favoured haunt for European and American whalers. Eyre had a supply dump established at Fowlers Bay, with supplies being dropped off by ship. This was to be Eyre's launching point for an epic journey.

Only Eyre and Wylie made it to Albany... the 2 others had killed Baxter and disappeared with the party's provisions.

Wylie had little experience in such an arid landscape. He was a Noongar man from King George Sound at Albany – vastly different country to the arid Nullarbor landscape. Very importantly though, Wylie had the language skills to seek help from other Indigenous people along the way.

Go [here for a detailed account](#) of Eyre and Wylie's incredible feat. It's an excellent read and reveals what an extraordinary man Eyre was.

Fowlers Bay, Transport Hub Of Yesteryear

Mapped by Dutchman François Thijssen in 1627 and named by Matthew Flinders in 1802, Fowlers Bay was favoured by whalers in the 1840s. Southern Right Whales and Humpbacks would come into the protected waters of the bay to rest. Of course the whalers followed.



THE PROTECTED BAY WAS A HAVEN FOR RESTING WHALES ON THEIR ANNUAL MIGRATION.

Proclaimed a town in 1890, Fowlers Bay had grown to become an important transport hub for locations west of the bay. Large sheep stations like “Yalata” needed a reliable transport link back to markets in Adelaide and further afield.

With the advent of efficient and reliable road transport, Fowlers Bay faded into obscurity. Now it's a picturesque settlement on the edge of a pristine bay. Recreational fishing, whale-watching and a laid-back atmosphere attract tourists.

Well worth a visit.



THIS JETTY WAS ONCE PART OF A VITAL TRANSPORT HUB FOR THE REGION.

Yalata, A “New” Fuel Stop

Many years ago, Yalata had a Roadhouse. However, it was condemned and closed several years ago.

The good news is, Yalata now has a 24 hour self-serve fuel bowser. And there’s plans to construct a roadhouse soon.

If you’re thinking of visiting Maralinga, turn off west of Nundroo and follow the road for about 200 km into the site of Australia’s first nuclear weapons test site. You’ll need a permit and directions.

Note: You need a permit to visit Maralinga. [Go here for more information](#). There’s a barrier gate and the site is security fenced. You’ll find all the information you need [to gain access to Maralinga here](#).

The story of Maralinga is both fascinating and horrifying. The lies and deceit about what happened there have far-reaching effects, even now. [Frank Walker brings the story to life](#) in all its ugly detail.

The country around Yalata is quite hilly and heavily timbered. Then the saltbush appears. There’s a few sand dunes, the trees quickly thin out, and you drop down onto the vast limestone plain of the Nullarbor. Well, maybe not drop... more like ease.



BETWEEN FOWLERS BAY AND HEAD OF THE BIGHT, EYRE HWY

Since the limestone is so porous, it can't sustain anything much larger than shrubs. Hence the reason why the Nullarbor has so few trees.



THE “OFFICIAL” BEGINNING OF THE NULLARBOR PLAIN THROUGH A DIRTY WINDSCREEN.

By the way, quite a few of you have asked if you can still [drive on the Old Eyre Highway](#), between Yalata and Nullarbor Roadhouse. Not any more. There’s no longer any public access on this section of the old highway.

Head Of The Bight – Gentle Giants

About 165 km west of Fowlers Bay (85 km west of Yalata) is Head Of Bight. From May to October, Southern Right Whales come to Head Of Bight to mate, calve and just generally hang out together.

Southern Right Whales are so-called because they were the “right” ones to hunt... slow moving with huge supplies of whale oil.

A fantastic viewing platform provides uninterrupted views of the whales. You feel like you could reach down and touch them. Yes, you have to pay to watch the whales... but believe me it’s worth it.



A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE WHALES FROM THE VIEWING PLATFORM.

[An excellent Visitors Centre](#) will teach you all you ever wanted to know about whales.

We visited Head Of Bight in October, right at the end of the season. So weren't really expecting to see any whales. This particular season, 50 whales with calves had been living there.

All the calves had grown and gained strength, ready for their epic swim south in the Southern Ocean. Pair by pair, Mum and bub had left the safety of Head Of Bight for unknown perils and adventures. All but one pair...

One mother and calf were still there. This was highly unusual, normally they would have all departed.

What a sight! Such majestic creatures, and so big! Mum weighs in at up to 80 tonnes and around 15 metres long, while the "baby" calf is up to 1-1/2 tonnes and 6 metres long at birth.

They were right in close to the shore.



THESE CREATURES ARE HUGE!

Mum was quietly floating around while the calf was playing... disappearing only to pop up behind Mum, in front of Mum, and several times lie on top of Mum. We were mesmerised.



BUB HAVING A REST ON MUM'S TUMMY.

Nullarbor Roadhouse

Nullarbor Roadhouse is just 20 km west of Head Of Bight. This is a popular stopping point for travellers, something of a must-see destination. There's always a few road trains, caravans and backpacker vans parked out the front.



NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE. NOTE THE REPLICA OF THE ORIGINAL ROADHOUSE ON THE RIGHT. THIS WAS LOCATED JUST NORTH OF HERE AND SERVICED [TRAVELLERS USING THE OLD EYRE HIGHWAY](#).

It's also a good place to camp. While the campground looks barren and exposed at first, this is all part of the experience. Spend a night there... you can while away the hours before dark observing the wide variety of travellers who pass through.



THE CARAVAN PARK AT NULLARBOR ROADHOUSE.



ANOTHER TOURIST MAKING THEIR WAY ACROSS THE NULLARBOR.

This place has character, particularly the scale model of the old garage with the old bowser out the front.

[The Old Eyre Highway](#) leaves the current Highway here, on a route further inland.

You can follow the Old Eyre all the way to the WA border from Nullarbor Roadhouse. Be careful though. It's extremely remote and only suitable for well equipped 4WDs. Don't even consider going this way in summer.

3. Bunda Cliffs And Koonalda Station S.A.



YOU KNOW YOU'RE ON THE NULLARBOR PLAIN WHEN YOU SEE SIGNS LIKE THIS!

Rugged Coastlines and Crumbling Cliffs

West of Nullarbor Roadhouse, you get up close and personal with the Great Australian Bight.

The Bight is famous for its rugged cliffs and wild coastline. The highway runs quite close to the edge of the cliffs in places. Numerous marked areas let you get off the Eyre Highway and check out the rugged coastline.

The cliffs are quite dangerous. They're unstable and tend to break off in enormous chunks. As a result, several rest areas are closed. You'd be well advised to heed any warning signs... and keep a good eye on your kids.

Actually getting out of your vehicle and walking around gives you a feel for the scale of this place.

Looking south, next stop is Antarctica. You're standing on the edge of the enormous Nullarbor Plain, which is being gradually eaten away by the wild Southern Ocean. Turn around and look north – all you can see is an endless flat, treeless plain. Awe-inspiring.



THE MAGNIFICENT LIMESTONE CLIFFS OF THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN BIGHT

Bunda Cliffs

“And the wind did howl,
And the wind did moan,
La la la la la,
La la la la lee...”

Nick Cave could well have been camped on the edge of Bunda Cliffs when he compiled his version of the folk ballad Henry Lee.

There you are, all alone with an endless dead flat plain of stunted saltbush and bluebush surrounding 180 degrees of your vision. The remainder of your vista is filled with the wild seas of the Great Southern Ocean.



HEAVY CLOUD OVER A VAST PLAIN OF SALTBUSH AND BLUEBUSH.

Splitting these two opposing views are the battered and bruised limestone cliffs, being pummelled endlessly by the relentless sea.

And the wind constantly blows hard, only pausing to change direction and smash you again.

You can camp along these cliffs. Stay back from the edge though. The ocean undercuts the limestone until huge chunks break away and crash into the sea without warning.



WILD SKIES APPROACHING FROM THE SOUTH-WEST.

We're certainly not big fans of wind, but camping here is an experience not to be missed.

The ocean roars and boils angrily as it does battle with the cliffs. Slowly but surely, the ocean wins. I can well understand why early sailors were so terrified of straying close to the cliffs. If they were shipwrecked here, they'd have zero chance of survival.

The best part of camping here?

You quickly get a sense of proportion. Within minutes you feel like a tiny ant, an insignificant dot on the landscape. Even on a calm day, there's an epic battle underway between the water and the land... one that never ends.

Just watch you don't get blown into the ocean or into the Northern Territory!

There are no services along the Bunda Cliffs, so you'll need to be entirely self-contained including a toilet.

Koonalda Station, Surprisingly Remote

About 100km west of Nullarbor Roadhouse is the turn-off to Koonalda Station. This turn-off is unmarked. A couple at Ceduna had told us where to turn off – vague instructions about passing the four hundredth camel sign and turn right just after the burnt out log or something like this! However with a decent GPS ([HEMA HX-2 Navigator](#) or equivalent), you'll find it easily.

Follow the dirt road for 14km until you reach [Old Eyre Highway](#). Cross the old highway, continue for about a kilometre and you'll be there.

When we turned off Eyre Highway, I immediately had a strong feeling of remoteness. Completely illogical – the entire Nullarbor Plain is pretty darn remote!

Perhaps seeing other vehicles on the highway reassured me we'd have help in case of a breakdown. Then to turn off into a vast open expanse, knowing we were 100% alone... well, it was a little unsettling.

Strange. I'd never had this feeling before and it hasn't afflicted me since. Just saying.

Koonalda Station was to be our overnight rest stop. Situated in Nullarbor National Park, it was a working property until 1988.

The homestead is falling apart, the roof is caving in and of course there's dust covering everything. It looks sad and forlorn. The exterior is made from railway sleepers from the Trans Australian railway, and some windows and doors are from the old Telegraph Station at Eucla.



NOTE THE FENCE: IRONBARK RAILWAY SLEEPERS!



ENTIRE HOUSE IS MADE FROM RAILWAY SLEEPERS.

THE



THE HOUSE IS SLOWLY FALLING APART.

INSIDE,

Victims Of The Old Eyre Highway

First impressions of Koonalda Station are that it's like an old scrap metal yard. Immediate thought? "Yuk, what a mess". Rows of old cars in various states of disrepair seem to be scattered everywhere. But once you realise why the cars are there, the place takes on an entirely different complexion.

You see, [the Old Eyre Highway goes past the front gate](#). Koonalda was a service point for passing traffic – repairs, recoveries and fuel. Most of the old car bodies are wrecks of vehicles that didn't make it. Sadly, there's a fair share of mangled wrecks too. Clearly the Old Eyre Highway saw more than its fair share of bad accidents.



EARLY MODEL LAND-ROVER... SLOW, ROUGH, AND DUSTY!

AN



COUPLE OF OLD HOLDENS.

A



OLD GIRL WAS BADLY BUCKLED FROM A ROLLOVER.

THIS



LOOKS

LIKE THIS OLD VALIANT WAS USED FOR TARGET PRACTICE.

Remember, it was a dirt road all the way across. Rough and corrugated with reefs of rock and bull dust in the dry. In the wet, an ocean of mud.

Breakdowns were common. Unreliable cars travelling huge distances on such a notorious road was a bad combination. So when a vehicle expired – a common occurrence – it would be towed in and used for spare parts.

Ghosts Of The Past at Koonalda Station

Koonalda's a pretty spooky place at night. Wind rattling through loose corrugated iron roof sheets and doors banging on their hinges actually freaked me out a bit. For some reason, this place was getting under my skin.

While the place is fascinating and a stark reminder of hard times from our recent past, it's also full of ghosts.

Standing at the old fuel pump, you can almost see the old Holden trundling down the highway, smothered in a cloud of dust... an old bloke wandering out of the shed in his greasy overalls... an oily rag in his back pocket... gazing at the billowing dust in the distance across the shimmering Nullarbor Plain... waiting to see if the car turns in, or continues on its way.



THE OLD BOWSER AND SHED AT KOONALDA STATION. THIS WAS TAKEN QUITE A FEW YEARS AGO AND THE SHED HAS DETERIORATED BADLY SINCE...



THE RELENTLESS WINDS HAVE LEFT THEIR MARK ON BOTH THE SHED AND THE BOWSER SINCE WE LAST VISITED.

Nowhere to Hide

Late in the afternoon, a strong southerly change came through. Now a southerly in these parts can be savage... and it was. Fierce winds straight out of the Bight and no protection between the coast and our campsite.

We thought we were clever by setting up camp behind a shed. It worked a treat, until the wind swung around from the east in the middle of the night. All of a sudden, our little oasis was exposed to the full force of an easterly gale.

All night the camper creaked and groaned... joining the orchestra of old doors banging and corrugated iron flapping away.



OUR FIRST VISIT TO KOONALDA SEVERAL YEARS AGO. THE CAMPER WAS BATTERED BY WIND ALL NIGHT.

This was an initiation into the changeable weather and winds in this area. Be aware – strong winds can and do swing around a full 180 degrees in a matter of moments.

Welcome to the Nullarbor Plain... you've been warned!

No Escape From The Wind

Bunda Cliffs is the ideal introduction to Koonalda Station. It gives you a sense of the vastness of the Nullarbor Plain and the savage climate, which feels like it wants to tear everything apart.

Then the short trip north to Koonalda Station drops you into another world... yet the same savage winds follow close behind, determined to wreak havoc. There's no escape from the wind, nothing to stop it no matter what direction it blows from.

You could be a million miles from anywhere. Yet you're only a handful of kilometres from the Eyre Highway.

It's this sense of isolation that makes the Nullarbor Plain so appealing.

3. Koonalda Cave S.A.

Koonalda Cave – What Lies Beneath The Surface?

The Nullarbor is basically a huge slab of limestone. In places, the limestone has dissolved to form caves. Some of these caves connect with the ocean to form blowholes, while others contain drinkable water.



WATCH OUT FOR THE HOLE!

Koonalda Cave lies a few kilometres north of Koonalda Station homestead. Measuring 85 metres in diameter, this is a seriously large hole in the ground. The only indication of the cave is a fence. You won't see the sinkhole until you're right on top of it.

The sides drop vertically for about 20 metres, with some parts undercut. From here, a steep slope leads down to the floor at about 70m depth. At this point, the cave apparently opens into a giant 60 x 90 metre cavern. A domed roof towers about 40 metres overhead.



UNDERCUT WALLS. THE ENTRANCE HIDES A WHOLE OTHER UNDERGROUND WORLD.

More Questions Than Answers

Apparently, various caves branch off from the main chamber. Venturing deep underground in the 1950s, archeologist Dr Alexander Gallus discovered Indigenous art dating back 22,000 years.

Long lines of finger painting etched in the soft walls presented archeologists with a mysterious puzzle:

- How were they created, given there's no natural light?
- What do they mean, why are they there?
- What's their cultural significance?
- Do they perhaps point out where the flint mines are?

When archeologists explored Koonalda Cave in the mid 1950s, they thought Aboriginals had occupied Australia for "only" 8,700 years.

This [discovery turned accepted knowledge on its head](#).

The local Mirning people used the cave to mine flint, and as a source of drinking water. Being hard and durable, flint was ideal for stone tools. Remember, this was happening around 22,000 years ago.

More recently, the Mirning People used Koonalda Cave as an initiation site. Modern cavers use ropes and ladders to descend the cave. But the Indigenous people have a pathway down the sheer walls... they have no need of ladders.

The Plain Lives and Breathes

Indigenous people are afraid of the Nullarbor... or more accurately, afraid of Ganba the magic snake. They believe Ganba lives below the surface. He comes to the surface and thrashes around, causing dust storms. He drinks all the rainwater – as soon as it rains, the water disappears. He ate all the trees. He eats people... many people have entered the Nullarbor, never to return.



GANBA'S TERRITORY. FORMIDABLE COUNTRY. STARVATION, DEHYDRATION OR DISAPPEARING DOWN A HOLE – VERY REAL TRAPS FOR THE UNWARY OR FOOLISH.

It's a great explanation of what these people witnessed. Think about it – there are many sinkholes descending into caves. A change in air pressure at the surface causes the air to either rush in or out of the holes. These small holes in the plain appear to be breathing. Even worse, the accompanying sounds can send chills down your spine.

Ganba's down there, it all makes sense.



ONE LONELY TREE LOOKS DECIDEDLY OUT OF PLACE.



KOONALDA CAVE DWARFS OUR 4WD.

Therefore the Indigenous people tended to live along the coast or in the desert country, and not venture far onto the plain. Near the coast, fresh water was found in soaks behind sand dunes. Given Ganba was lurking, Koonalda Cave was used as an initiation site – the ultimate test of manhood.

Saving Koonalda Cave From Vandals

Koonalda Cave has an unimaginably long and rich history. And it's basically in the middle of nowhere. So you'd assume people would respect it, right?

Apparently not.

In 2022, an unknown group of morons dug under an access gate, climbed down into the cave, and scrawled graffiti over a section of art. I'm not going to tell you what they wrote, I'm not giving them that recognition.

We're talking about trashing perfectly preserved finger paintings... finger paintings created *22,000 years ago*. To give you a reference point in time, the first pyramid in Egypt was built around 4,500 years ago.

In 2023, the federal government announced funding for improved fencing and security cameras. While this is a welcome announcement, the fact we even need this added security is beyond sad.

What is it about the Indigenous culture that so many of us are afraid of?

Australia has the oldest continuous culture in the world by a long shot, yet many of us can't seem to accept this fact.

We're awe-inspired by man-made structures that are only a couple of thousand years old at the most... the pyramids, York cathedral, and so on. And they're impressive, for sure.

But Australia has man-made creations an order of magnitude older than those things we revere overseas:

- Finger paintings and mining at Koonalda Caves over 22,000 years old. Damaged by graffiti.
- More than one million petroglyphs over 50,000 years old near Karratha in WA. Under threat from vandals, iron ore mining, and emissions from a nearby LNG plant.
- Juukan Cave in WA which had artefacts proving over 46,000 years of continuous occupation. Blown up and completely destroyed by Rio Tinto...

...to name but three.

Yet many of us don't seem to care.

If an ancient art site was vandalised in Europe, there'd be worldwide uproar. And rightly so. But I'm guessing this is probably the first you've even heard of the 2022 vandalism at Koonalda Cave.

It's high time we grew up as a nation. It's time we showed some collective pride in the incredibly rich and diverse cultures that have developed in Australia for at least 65,000 years.

4. Koonalda Cave to Border Village S.A.

Wild Winds, Wild Ocean

On our first trip across the Nullarbor, the weather gods decided we needed an initiation. A ferocious Easterly gale whipped up overnight, and tried to blow us clean off Nullarbor Plain!

We've crossed the Nullarbor many times now. Incredibly, each time we've managed to strike a tailwind... for most of each journey at least.

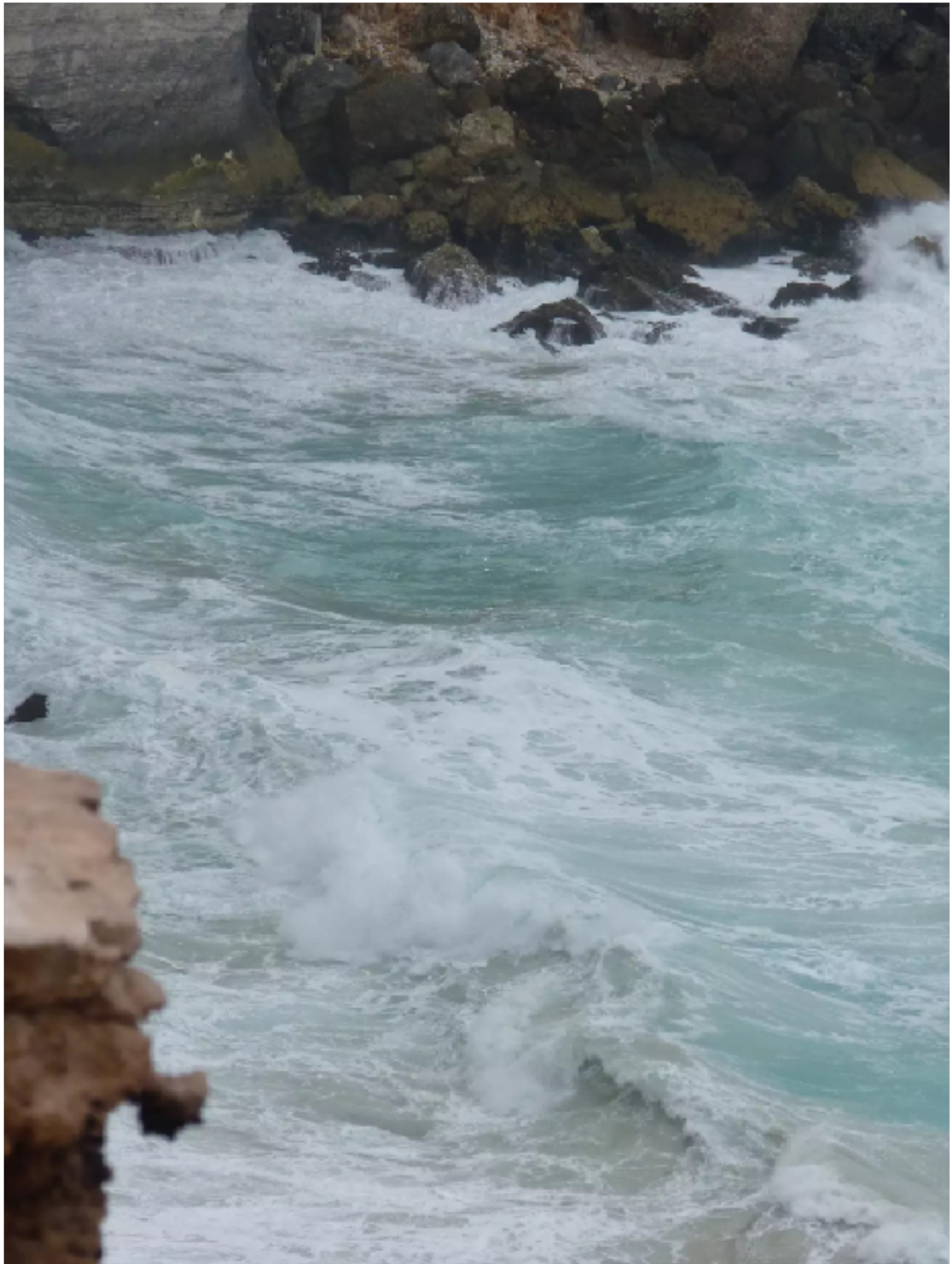
When the wind does decide to turn and hit you head on, it's a continuous battle to maintain speed. And fuel economy flies out the window.

Leaving Koonalda Station, we drove back down to the Eyre highway and turned left towards Border Village. This part of the Great Australian Bight is feared by sailors. A couple of really good viewing areas showed us why...

The ocean was a boiling cauldron, smashing up against the giant limestone cliffs. The photos simply don't do it justice.



WHEN THE SOUTHERN OCEAN GETS ANGRY, YOU REALLY DON'T WANT TO BE DOWN THERE AMONG IT ALL.



THE WAVES WERE HAMMERING INTO THE CLIFFS. NO WONDER SAILORS HAVE NIGHTMARES ABOUT THIS STRETCH OF COASTLINE.

Old Eyre Highway, The Slow Road to Border Village

If you want a small taste of what road conditions were like before the Eyre Highway was sealed, then turn right off the highway about 20km east of Border Village. This takes you to a short section of the Old Eyre Highway, which ends at Border Village.



This is typical of what you'll experience on [the Old Eyre Highway](#).

We've driven the Old Eyre Highway from Border Village all the way through to Nullarbor Roadhouse. It's a fantastic trip, passing through some truly remote country. [Go here to find out more about what to expect on a trip along the Old Eyre Highway](#).

This short section near Border Village is a good way to get a quick look at the old highway, without doing the whole trip. And you might have noticed the trees. They start to appear just shy of the border. Nothing to get too excited about, but trees all the same.

We encountered a huge camel on the track up to the Old Eyre Highway. He ran in front of us for ages, wagging his oversized camel head from side to side. There was no way he was getting off the track!



OUR FRIEND MR CAMEL...

At the Old Eyre Highway, we turned left and thankfully Mr Camel turned right.

The road surface is pretty savage... hardly surprising since you're on a massive limestone plain. When it was the main route, it would have been a nightmare journey – hard limestone rock for hundreds of kms, huge corrugations, bottomless pits of bull dust, then mud in the wet.

Old Eyre Highway was notorious for rollovers. The [car graveyard at Koonalda Station](#) is testament to this.

Bull dust holes were the main cause. When you hit one at speed, you and your vehicle would be launched into the air or whipped sideways. Cars and trucks often ended up on their roofs.

Old tyre tubes are still strewn along the road. It wasn't unusual to carry 6 spare tyres back in the days of cross-ply tyres and tubes. Then you'd be repairing tubes on the side of the road once they were all used up.

The old highway looks lonely now. Bushes and trees grow out of the surface and it has a slightly spooky and abandoned feel. If you decide to travel this road, be aware it's very remote and really is the "road less travelled". Be prepared.

Ray Gilleland wrote a fascinating account of his daily struggles with the Old Eyre Highway. He was a long-distance truck driver from Sydney to Perth and return in the 1950's. Called "[The Nullarbor Kid](#)", it's well worth reading... a living history of times gone by.

Border Village, Crossing the Border

Border Village has a roadhouse and a quarantine station. Oh, and hole on the [Nullarbor Links, the longest golf course in the world](#).

The quarantine station is on the South Australian/Western Australian border. Be warned, they take no prisoners. Pretty much anything that looks like fruit and veggies or could have been at some stage in its life, is considered contraband.

Even things like honey and seeds will be confiscated.

You'll find [all the info on what's allowed through W.A. quarantine here](#). It's a short list!



THE ROADHOUSE AND QUARANTINE STATION IN THE DISTANCE.

Note, if you're heading back into South Australia, there's no quarantine check at all. You drive straight through.

Border Village operates on its own time zone, called Central Western Standard Time. It's very confusing, especially since we never knew it existed the first time we passed through here.

This bizarre timezone covers a small patch from Border Village to Caiguna in the west. It's 45 minutes ahead of the rest of WA. But WA is 1-½ hours behind SA. So Border Village to Caiguna is 45 minutes behind SA.

And if daylight saving's happening, then WA is 2-½ hours behind SA. So that makes Border Village 1-¾ hours behind SA. Or maybe not. Does Central Western Standard Time have daylight saving? Who knows!

Best you just ignore it all and hope for the best...



A KANGAROO HOLDING A VEGEMITE JAR... DIFFERENT.



BORDER VILLAGE IS HOME TO ONE OF THE 18 HOLES ON THE NULLARBOR LINKS GOLF COURSE. WATCH OUT FOR THE SNAKES!

How best to summarise Border Village? Well, it's a popular rest area for professional drivers... and a popular point for travellers attempting to eat thirty oranges before they cross over the border.

Beyond that, there's not a whole lot happening in Border Village!

5. Eucla to Caiguna W.A.

Eucla, The Town That Moved

Only a dozen kilometres west of Border Village is Eucla, perched on the edge of the escarpment. It has accommodation, fuel and basic services. Eucla is the easternmost settlement in Western Australia.

Eucla's best known for the Overland Telegraph Station down on the plain.

Construction of an overland telegraph line from Adelaide to Albany started in the 1870's. A manual repeater station was built at Eucla. An operator would receive a Morse code signal, then re-transmit it to the next repeater station.



THE OLD TELEGRAPH STATION IS GRADUALLY BEING BURIED BY THE FINE WHITE SAND.

Over time, technology advances made the telegraph line redundant. The Telegraph Station wasn't needed anymore, and was left to be buried under the ever-shifting sand dunes.

The township used to be down here too. But after rabbits stripped the place bare, the sand dunes started moving towards the town. So it was relocated to the top of the escarpment.



LOOKING FROM THE OLD TOWNSHIP SITE, ACROSS THE PLAIN TO THE PRESENT EUCLA TOWNSHIP ON TOP OF THE ESCARPMENT.

A port was established to supply the township. A jetty and tram line were built from the port to the township.

You can walk to the old jetty on a track past the Overland Telegraph Station, and dip your toes in the Southern Ocean. We started along this sandy track, but turned back because of rain. One day...

Mundrabilla Roadhouse

The Eyre Highway drops off the plateau at Eucla, down Eucla Pass. Once on the plain, it's mainly saltbush and a few trees. The trees have a distinct lean towards the north, a giveaway as to the strength of the wind in these parts.



HEADING TOWARDS MUNDRABILLA FROM EUCLA.

Mundrabilla Roadhouse sits 65km west of Eucla. This tidy place has a campground, bar and fuel.

It's tucked into the lee of the escarpment, so is better protected than most places along the Nullarbor. Having said this, most bad weather comes from the south, so it still gets hammered from this direction.

Madura and The Fabled Old Coach Road

Madura is on Madura Pass, 116km west of Mundrabilla. This is where the Eyre Highway climbs back up the escarpment. You can get fuel and find a place to stay here for the night.



APPROACHING THE ROADHOUSE AT THE BOTTOM OF MADURA PASS.

If you're keen, follow a track south along the base of the escarpment for about 30km to Madura Caves. Ask one of the locals where to find the start of the track.

A bit of history for you. Nearby Madura Homestead bred horses for the British Army during the Boer War. These became known as Walers in World War One, proving themselves as reliable mounts for the Australian Light Horse. An unlikely place to breed horses I would have thought, yet I imagine these horses would have been tough.

The Old Coach Road follows the top of the escarpment from Madura to Eucla. It runs through private property, so make sure you call the station owners for permission first.

Don't be surprised if they don't let you go along the Old Coach Road. Firstly, they're working properties. Secondly, they're a bit over rescuing stranded tourists. Remember, you're on their land. So if they don't want you travelling along the Old Coach Road, then respect their wishes.

And thirdly, it seems most of the locals agree the Old Coach Road was never used as a coach road... or as the main Nullarbor route. The original route followed the Overland telegraph line, which ran along the plain.

Most likely, the Old Coach Road was simply an access track for the sheep stations along the top of the escarpment.

Cocklebidy

Once you climb Madura Pass, the country is quite different. You'll discover long stretches of quite heavily wooded country, interspersed with saltbush plains. The country continues like this all the way to Fraser Range, where you're into "real" timbered country.

91km west of Madura is Cocklebidy. As is a common theme along the Nullarbor, they have fuel, camping and a basic motel.



COCKLEBIDDY ROADHOUSE. WE DIDN'T HAVE TOO MUCH TROUBLE FINDING A PARKING SPOT!

Cocklebidy Cave is close by. About 10km west of Cocklebidy, turn right and drive on a dirt road for another 10km. The cave is closed to the public... meaning you can't walk into it. However, it's an awe-inspiring cave, mostly underwater and running all the way out to sea. Go here for a summary of [what you'll see at Cocklebidy Cave](#).



DON'T BE DETERRED BY THE "CAVE CLOSED" SIGN.

Cocklebiddy's also the gateway to the Eyre Bird Observatory. Travel 16km east, then turn right and follow the track for 30km. It's 4WD-only, as there's plenty of soft sand and mallee scrub as you approach the ocean.

Caiguna... What Time Is It?

Caiguna marks the eastern end of the 90 Mile Straight, the longest straight stretch of road in Australia. Caiguna's 65km west of Cocklebiddy... just a stone's throw when you're crossing the Nullarbor!

It has fuel and a campground.

We arrived sometime around 3pm, give or take a few hours. We were still confused about this Central Western Standard Time concept (see [here](#) for details). So I asked the young lady behind the counter what time it was. She had no idea either!

The day was growing long. So we decided to push on a little bit further, then find a place to camp. What could be better than camping somewhere along 90 Mile Straight?

6. Caiguna to Balladonia W.A.

The 90 Mile Straight

Caiguna is at the eastern end of the 90 Mile Straight... 146.6km of arrow-straight road. Balladonia's just west of the western end.

It's the longest stretch of straight road in Australia and one of the longest in the world. These facts give you something to look forward to as you start your drive along this straight. But after a while, reality sets in and monotony takes over.



OUR FIRST TRIP ACROSS THE NULLARBOR, WITH THE KIDS POSING FOR THE OBLIGATORY PHOTO. IT SEEMS LIKE A LIFETIME AGO NOW!

It's almost like Caiguna was established just to give people somewhere to pull over and recover from holding the steering wheel dead straight for 146km.

Actually, this is not far from the truth. Caiguna was established in 1962 to provide facilities for people driving to and from the Commonwealth Games in Perth.

We camped along the 90 Mile Straight, in behind a rest area. A maze of tracks run in behind the rest area on both sides of the road, allowing you get well away from the highway.



THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT CAMPING ON THE NULLARBOR... EVEN WHEN THE WEATHER'S DREARY!

The thin trees provide a sliver of shade, with the ever-present saltbush dotted all around. A few other travellers stopped here as well, obviously defeated by the monotony of the 90 Mile Straight.

We love these camp spots.

Instead of viewing the landscape through the windscreen, you get a chance to experience it firsthand. The occasional bird, the harshness of this massive limestone plain, meeting other travellers... you only have these experiences when you stop and look around.

Balladonia – The Sky Is Falling!

The settlement of Balladonia is 181km and just a few gentle curves west of Caiguna. You've passed the western end of the 90 Mile Straight. Nearby Balladonia Station was established in the 1870s as a sheep station.

Balladonia settlement was another link in the Overland Telegraph line. Today, travellers enjoy welcome break from their long journey in a [modern roadhouse and motel](#).



BALLADONIA ROADHOUSE UNDER HEAVY SKIES.

By the time you reach Balladonia, the small trees have grown substantially and you're into quite thickly timbered country. Real trees!

From here on, you're in the Great Western Woodlands. These woodlands cover around 16 million hectares, forming the largest intact Mediterranean woodlands in the world.

Balladonia's claim to fame is its connection to Skylab.

For those too young to remember, Skylab was the United States' first orbiting space station. It orbited the Earth from 1973 to 1979. Skylab sustained damage at initial launch, which was patched up by the first group of astronauts to visit Skylab. However, over time Skylab's orbit had been affected and eventually it re-entered the Earth's atmosphere.

Skylab's re-entry made worldwide news at the time. Of course the tabloids went crazy, with predictions of mass wipeouts in major cities. NASA frantically tried to steer it away from populated areas and it looked like Skylab would fall to Earth in South Africa.

On 11th July, 1979 Skylab came back to Earth in Western Australia, not South Africa as forecast. Balladonia was one of the places showered with space debris, prompting President Jimmy Carter to apologise for the mess!

Balladonia has a camping area, small motel and a Roadhouse. From here on, the road has some quite decent hills. You're heading into Fraser Range.

Fraser Range Station – Trees Again!

East of Balladonia, you'll pass through the granite hills of Fraser Range.

You're well into the trees now, surrounded by the biggest hardwood eucalyptus forest in the world. This forest contains over 20% of Australia's native plant species and is a critically important habitat for threatened species of both plants and animals.



THIS GENTLE STUMPY TAIL LIZARD WAS WELL CAMOUFLAGED ON THE GRAVEL.

It's the oldest eucalypt forest in the world, sitting on top of Country formed between 2.4 and 3.7 billion years ago.

The salmon gums are beautiful. Their deep salmon-coloured trunks and bright green leaves almost look fake. They shine like they've been polished from top to toe.



SALMON GUMS LINE THE EYRE HIGHWAY ON THE DRIVE THROUGH FRASER RANGE.

Fraser Range Station used to be open for camping and accommodation. It was an ideal spot to rest your weary body. However, it closed due to the Covid pandemic.

They do plan to re-open, but haven't set a date at this stage. [Go here to check for the latest on opening dates for Fraser Range Station.](#)

You're now a stone's throw – just 105km – from Norseman, the unofficial end of the Nullarbor.



HILLS OF THE FRASER RANGES IN THE BACKGROUND. TAKEN FROM FRASER RANGE STATION WHEN IT WAS OPEN.

Norseman – North Or South?

Norseman is the unofficial end of your Nullarbor journey. Congratulations, you made it!

Now you have a choice to make – North or South? Turn south... access to South-West WA, Esperance, Albany, the giant Karri and Tingle forests. Turn North... access to [the Goldfields](#), Perth and the rest of Western Australia. The choice is yours!

7. Other Unusual Travel Destinations

So here we are... we've reached the end of our Nullarbor journey.

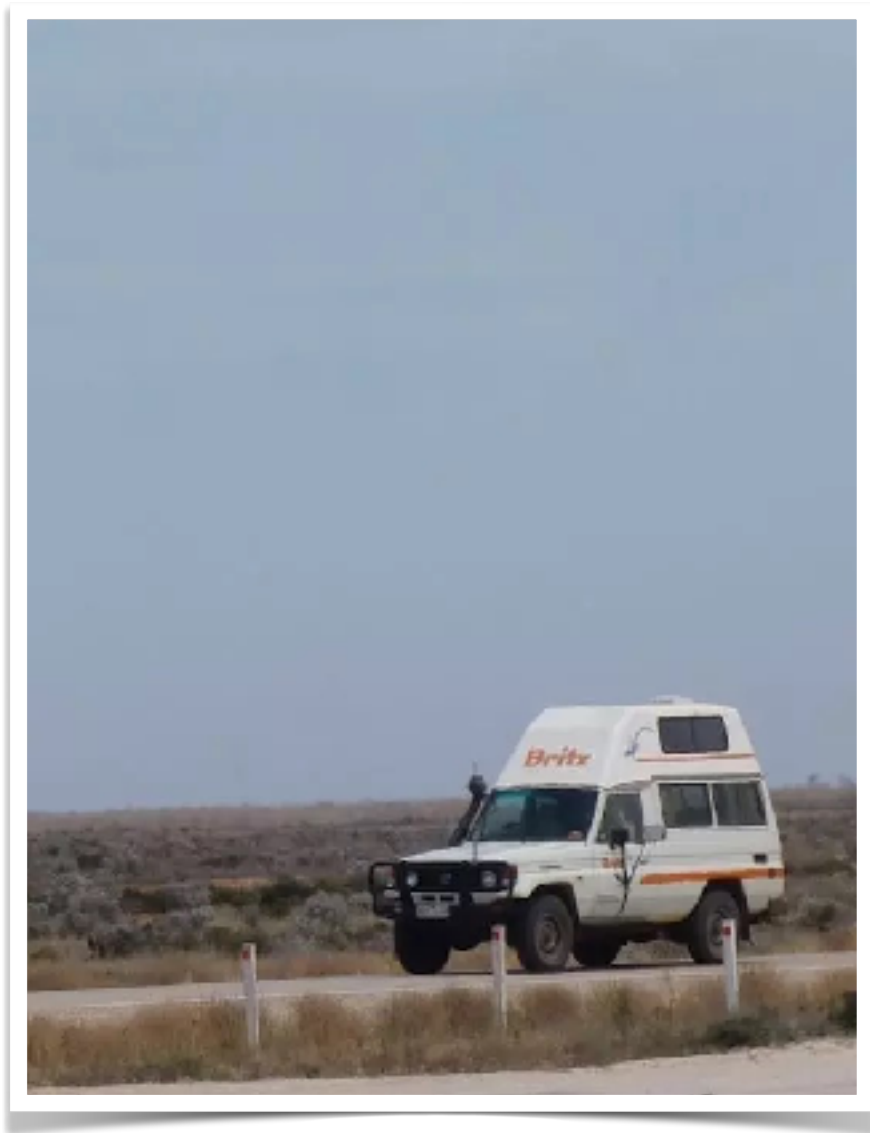
We really only scratched the surface though. With more time, you could spend weeks exploring the Nullarbor.

Let's have a look at some other options for you.

What Else Can I See Along The Nullarbor?

Short answer – lots!

You have a choice of some quite unusual travel destinations... places rarely visited. We'll have a quick look at some of your options.



A LONE VEHICLE MAKES ITS WAY ACROSS THE VASTNESS OF THE NULLARBOR.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Rather it's a starting point to give you more ideas on what to see as you explore the Nullarbor Plain. We've not been to many of the places listed below – yet. We'll add them as we explore each and every one of them!

Let's get started.

Old Eyre Highway

You can [follow the old Eyre Highway all the way from Nullarbor Roadhouse to Border Village](#) in the west. It's a magic trip through the past. When the highway was re-aligned further south in the 1970s, the old highway was no longer maintained.

You'll get a feel for what an epic journey this was. Picture in your mind the mud, dust and corrugations for hundreds of kilometres.

While you're there, take a side-trip to [Cook, "Queen City of the Nullarbor"](#). This once-bustling town is now a lonely outpost for a few hardy souls. It's well worth a visit, if only for the quirky signs and murals dotted around the old town.

Nullarbor's Famous Caves

Caves are dotted all across the Nullarbor. A hole the size of your fist on the surface could well open into a giant underground chamber. Even caves that appear to be big on the surface can be many times larger underground. [Koonalda Cave](#) is one such example.

Many websites can give you a glimpse into the Nullarbor's magical underground world. Just a few examples are [Australian Geographic](#), [Melbourne Uni](#) and [this video from ABC Science Online](#). Although slightly dated (from 1993), it has some beautiful footage of the caves.

The Trans-Australian Railway

Stretching over 1,700km from Port Augusta in the east to Kalgoorlie in the west, the Trans-Australian Railway is a vital transport link. It includes the world's longest straight stretch – an extraordinary 478km. It was completed in 1917.

Access along the service track beside the line is strictly prohibited. People still run the gauntlet and drive or ride the access track. However, remember you are travelling through private property – I'm sure you wouldn't like random people driving through your back yard. Secondly, if you break down and the train has to stop you'll be paying a massive fine. This covers the cost of stopping and re-starting a huge train and the delays you've caused at the other end. You've been warned...



A FREIGHT TRAIN AT [COOK, SOUTH AUSTRALIA](#).

There are over 50 settlements listed along the line. They were established to supply and maintain the steam locomotives and the line itself. Most are now ruins or on private property. The remainder are ghost towns. Once the line was privatised, the few remaining residents left for good.

However, you can access a few of the settlements along the line from the Eyre Highway to the south. Information is sketchy, but if you're really keen, start [here](#). And [here is a video of the Tea and Sugar train from 1954](#), which supplied everyone living and working along the line.

[Kalgoorlie Tourist Information Centre](#) and [Wadlata Outback Centre](#) in Port Augusta are great starting points. They should have up to date information on access to settlements along the line.

Nullarbor Links – Fancy A Round Of Golf?

If you're desperate for a golf game as you cross the Nullarbor, you're in luck! The 18 hole Nullarbor Links golf course spans the Nullarbor. But bring your golf cart – it's nearly 1,400km from start to finish. Hole 1 is at Ceduna, hole 18 at Kalgoorlie. Enjoy!

[Pedestrian tv have a light-hearted video on Nullarbor Links](#).

Maralinga – Ground Zero

In the 1950's the nuclear arms race was in full swing. Britain was desperate to catch up with the US and USSR. What better place to test nuclear weapons than the Australian Outback? After all, there's nothing out there... is there?

British colonial arrogance and Australia's simpering submission to the "mother country" were a bad mix. The effects of nuclear fallout on the local Indigenous population were ignored. [A sobering account can be found here](#). Be sure to watch the video at the end.

Accounts of servicemen being used as human guinea pigs and [numerous birth defects](#) have also come to light over the years.

Maralinga is a shameful chapter in our history.

Having said this, Maralinga is a [popular destination](#) for those wanting to see it for themselves.

Len Beadell Tracks

The [Connie Sue Highway](#) runs from Rawlinna on the Trans-Australian Railway to Warburton in central east WA. Built by the famed [Len Beadell](#), it can be accessed from Cocklebiddy on the Eyre Highway.

Be warned – it is a highway by name only. The Connie Sue is remote and unforgiving. Preparation is essential.

Nuytsland Nature Reserve

[Nuytsland Nature Reserve](#) is located on the coast, south of Cocklebiddy. It's best known as the site of the Eyre Bird Observatory. The observatory was actually Eyre Telegraph Station before it was moved away from the coast.

The Nullarbor... So Much More Than a Treeless Plain

So there you have it. The Nullarbor's so much more than a treeless plain.

Of course there's way more to see than what I've listed above. The Nullarbor's full of surprises, and a few rather unusual travel destinations!

And always remember to have a yarn with the locals. The people are friendly and relaxed. Typical country people...

So which way are you going to go, north to Kalgoorlie and the [massive Super Pit](#)? North then east to Perth? Or South to Esperance? The choice is yours... enjoy!