

**Wheatbelt Wanderings – A Trip Through The Heartlands of WA**  
**Words and Pictures – Karl Fehlauer**  
**[www.westralianimages.com](http://www.westralianimages.com)**

As a young boy I grew up in the Avon Valley, Western Australia which is a part of the region known as 'The Wheatbelt'. The Wheatbelt is approximately 154 862 km<sup>2</sup> in size and it extends east from Perth to the Goldfields – Esperance Region and is bordered by the Mid-West Region to the north, the South West and Great Southern Regions to the south.

As the name indicates it is famous as a wheat and grain growing area producing two thirds of the state's wheat production and it relies heavily on farming to survive. Over the years many areas of the Wheatbelt have suffered from bad droughts and poor harvests so many people are doing it hard just to make a living.

As well as agriculture the region also produces half of the states wool production, lamb and mutton, many other agricultural products including honey, flowers, oranges and other products.

I recall vividly as a young boy driving around the Region with my father on many trips as he went about his activities and I remember sitting in the car looking out the window at the country side wishing I was somewhere else as there was just farms and paddocks.

Fast forward nearly forty years and I have just discovered what my father liked about the area, that vast open country with vivid blue skies, the colours of the land and the feeling of insignificance in this ancient land when there is just you and your partner standing at the base of ancient rocks that have been here for millions of years and there is no-one else there. The silence at night is truly wonderful.

The Wheatbelt may be famous as an agricultural growing region but looking beyond that there is an ancient land with gigantic granite rock formations and other natural land formations as well as aboriginal and white man's history waiting to be discovered.

Many people have heard of the famous Wave Rock located just outside of the town of Hyden in the Central Wheatbelt which attracts over 130 000 visitors a year but how many have heard of Elachbutting Rock, Eaglestone Rock or Kokerbin Rock which is reputed to be the third largest monolith in Australia – not many I guess and neither had I until recently.

In March 2015 my wife and I did a quick trip through the Eastern Wheatbelt and we enjoyed it so much that in March 2016, I decided to lead a trip for members of my 4WD club and show them the Region.

Our trip started off from the historic town of Toodyay which is located about 100 km to the north of Perth. Toodyay was originally named Newcastle until 1910 when it was renamed Toodyay. This town has many old buildings from the late 1800s that have been restored including Old Newcastle Gaol and the Connors Flour

Mill. This is a great place to start the trip especially for those interested in photography as there are lots of great photographic opportunities.

From Toodyay, we made our way towards the town of Goomalling and as an avid photographer I made many stops along the way photographing old buildings and farming equipment that line the route in the farmer's paddocks.



From Goomalling we made our way towards Wyalkatchem and Kununoppin following roughly the old route taken by would be gold prospectors heading towards the Yilgarn Goldfields. Along the way there are many sites to stop and take in the scenery and history.

Our route also follows a part of the 'Wheatbelt Way' tourist route which has been developed by the local tourism authority which takes in 24 natural and historical sites in the north eastern region of the Wheatbelt. For more information on this trip and others places of interest go to [www.wheatbeltway.com.au](http://www.wheatbeltway.com.au).

As it was approaching lunch time we stopped at the small town of Yelbeni for lunch and here they have a fabulous display of old farming equipment in a shed on the side of the road. This was a great place to stop and have a bite to eat and take in some of the early history and stories of the district.

Once we had finished lunch we made our way towards Kununoppin where we turned north east towards Mukinbudin and made our way towards Beringbooding Rock. This Rock is famous for the rock wall made around the rock to catch water from the rains and fill a large water reservoir. This was constructed in the 1930s by subsistence labour.



We spent about an hour here having a good look around. As well as the water catchment there is also some ancient Aboriginal hand paintings as well as other sites of interest and there is also a free campsite to enjoy a few days of peaceful camping.



By now it was mid afternoon and we had to drag ourselves away from this site as we still had a short drive to go before reaching our destination for the night which was to be Elachbutting Rock, so we headed off in a north easterly direction towards the rock which we could see in the distance.

Elachbutting Rock in the local Nyoongar dialect means “big thing standing” and I can assure you that it is a big thing and an impressive sight as we made our way down Elachbutting Rd towards the Rock.

On arrival there is a one way circuit around the base of the Rock and camping is only allowed in the designated camping area. This area has a new drop toilet, tables and fire rings in place for use during the cooler months – no fires are allowed from Oct to Mar so please don't light them as the area is very dry during the warmer months.



Also please bring in your own fire wood and don't collect the wood in the area of the Rock as it is a nature reserve. Also there are no rubbish bins provided so you must take your rubbish out with you.

The camping area is large and can fit a lot of vehicles without the need for anyone to be on top of each other which is a pleasant feeling compared to many other camp grounds.

Just be warned though, the flies are very friendly so take along some very good insect repellent or fly nets to put over your hats, you may look silly but it is worth it.

Elachbutting Rock has two ‘waves’ which are located behind the tree line in the camping area. Whilst not as big as the ‘wave’ at Wave Rock the colours here are truly spectacular, especially early in the morning as the rays from the rising sun hits the rock face.



As well as the waves there is also a 40m tunnel known as ‘Monty’s Pass’ and a large acoustic cave called ‘King’s Cave’. Located nearby is a historic well site that is worth a look. I highly recommend taking your time and really exploring this site as it is worth it and again photo opportunities abound.

After spending the night there, the sun rise the next morning brought pink and purple hues to the sky which was cloudless so a clear day was ahead of us, just perfect for day 2 of exploring.

After we had breakfast we packed up the Campertrailer and got everything ready to leave and I took one final opportunity to grab some final photos before we headed off.

Our route for day 2 was to travel to Baladje Rock and Lake Baladje and then onto Billycutting Hill. Both of these places offer spectacular views especially Baladje Rock which over looks the large salt lake towards the Mount Manning Range Nature Reserve.



Lunch was spent at Billycutting Hill exploring the tracks and rock formations but as the afternoon was slowly coming to an end we decided to head to our overnight stop at Eaglestone Rock and Lake Brown. This is a spectacular natural granite rock outcrop that over looks Lake Brown which is a large salt lake.



The rock formations at Eaglestone Rock are simply amazing and will keep any landscape photographer busy for hours. For everyone else just exploring the area and taking in the sites will keep your interest going. There are drop toilets and a camping area for those wishing to stay overnight.



With morning came a spectacular sunrise across Lake Brown and after a hearty breakfast our campers were packed up and we were soon on our way. Our destination was Kokerbin Rock and after refuelling at Merredin we made our way via the small town of Bruce Rock.



We arrived at Kokerbin Rock mid morning and like the previous Rocks that we had visited on the previous day this site was just stunning in the beauty of it. The colours defied imagination, it was if Mother Nature had given a paint brush to a group of three year olds and told them to paint whatever they wanted.

Also the size of the Rock was breath taking as you approach it from a distance you can make it out and although it looks big but unlike Uluru which is in flat desert country, Kokerbin rises out from hilly farm lands and natural vegetation which surround it seems to reduce it's size until you are there standing at the base.

There are new toilets and BBQs located in the picnic area; however, you can not camp here anymore but there is a new camp ground at Kwolyin about 10 km away which features a new camp kitchen and toilets.

As with the other sites we visited, you can easily spend a good day or more here exploring the Rock and the immediate area but for us we only had an hour or so before we had to be on our way to the old abandoned site of Youndegin about 65 km to the north west of Kokerbin Rock.

After a good look around and having lunch we headed off for our final stop of the trip which was to be the old site of Youndegin. Arriving there mid afternoon all that is left now is the site of the old Police Station which was built back in 1866 when the site was founded. This is reputed to be the first country Police Station built in Western Australia and was built to protect those travelling to and from the Goldfields.

Eventually an Inn was built here as thirsty travellers made their way to the new goldfields; however, the site was all but abandoned when the new railway was built to the north and people stopped passing through.

The Police Station is being restored by the Cunderdin Historical Society and it is a fascinating place to spend an hour or so.

By now it was time to mount up and head back towards Perth as the day was slowly coming to an end and everyone had to get back to reality.

It had been a great couple of days and one that I hope to repeat later in the year when the wildflowers are out. We undertook this trip at the end of February when much of the countryside was dry but after the winter rains have come this whole region comes alive with wildflowers so we plan to make the trip in September to experience the different conditions and to see the world famous Western Australian wildflowers in all their glory.

We had only touched a bit of what the Wheatbelt has to offer and there is a lot more waiting to be seen and discovered for those who make the effort and get out there and look.

This was an easy journey as most of the time we were on sealed roads or well graded dirt roads with no dramas. You do need to watch your speed on the dirt roads as many of them are the infamous WA gravel roads and if you aren't experience in driving on them it is like driving on billions of ball bearings.

The total distance travelled for the weekend was approximately 1060 km from Rockingham and return over the three days but if you have the chance I think making it a longer trip would be more comfortable.

Most of the towns long the route have fuel available during the day Monday to Friday and Saturday mornings with the major towns having roadhouses open all the weekend. All of the towns have rest areas with toilets and most have shady areas.

If travelling on a weekend just be warned that some of these smaller country towns shut down at lunchtime on Saturday until Monday morning so it is advisable to make sure you are self sufficient until you reach the larger towns.

In summer this Region can get very hot and I would suggest that the better time to travel would be in the autumn through to the start of summer. The terrain, in most parts once you are in the Wheatbelt consists of farmlands and woodlands. There are a lot of nature reserves throughout the entire Region many with basic facilities so you can rest and enjoy them.

This Region is famous for its wildflowers which start to appear from late August through to the end of October. Please do not pick the wildflowers because in many cases they are very fragile and doing so kills the whole plant, instead take photos.

Oh and one more thing. As I mentioned earlier, the flies are very friendly and I mean very friendly and there are lots of them, in fact I think there are more flies per square meter than anywhere else. So make sure you have a very good quality fly repellent or a net for you hat otherwise you will spend most of your time shooing them away. But don't let that put you off as this is Australia and flies are a part of it.

I hope to see you all out there wandering the Wheatbelt in the near future.

## **Fact File**

### **Getting There**

This trip started in Toodyay and the distance to Elachbutting Rock was approximately 450 km with side trips and the total distance travelled for the weekend was approximately 1060 km. There is a lot more to see so taking longer would be ideal.

## **Access**

All roads travelled were bitumen or well graded dirt roads so a 2WD is suitable but during rain these roads may get very muddy so care should be taken.

## **Where to camp**

There are caravan parks in most of the towns within the Wheatbelt and most are clean and offer basic amenities. As well as caravan parks there are a number of camp grounds throughout the Region some have drop toilets but others do not. The campsites at Elachbutting and Eaglestone Rocks are free campsites and do have drop toilets and big open areas to camp. The campsite at Kwoylin has new toilets and a camper's kitchen. Most do not have rubbish points so you need to take out what you take in.

## **When to go**

I would avoid doing this trip during the summer months as the temperature would be unbearable. Autumn and winter will have cooler nights and a greater chance of rain and in spring the wildflowers will be out in force.

## **More info**

Most of the country towns in the Wheatbelt shut up from about 12 pm Saturday until Monday morning. Some of the towns will have a Pub that is open for meals and some also had small cafes or roadhouses open where you can get basic meals and the bigger ones may have a restaurant.

In regards to fuel some of the town's they have petrol stations that are open all weekends but many of the smaller ones don't. In some towns they have a 24 hour fuel point that can be accessed using your EFTPOS cards. A quick call to the various Shire Offices may assist with your planning.

So you need to plan accordingly when travelling throughout the Region on a weekend and I would advise taking all your food and spare fuel with you just in case but take the opportunity to stop and take a break in the towns as they will appreciate it.