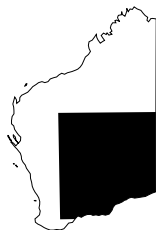


# The Southern Outback



Welcome to iconic outback Australia, where the searing red sandscapes of summer give way to clear, cold winter days and an inland horizon that reaches forever. Along the coast, wild dune country fronts up to the lonely waters of the Great Australian Bight where, fringing it, the relentless Nullarbor Plain leads on (and on and on) to South Australia.

This is remarkable wilderness country, more so because of its long history of human settlement by the Aboriginal people, whose lands stretch in great swaths through the centre. More recently, European settlers pushed through, slowly at first, and then in seething masses as news of the discovery of gold in the late 19th century filtered out.

The gold rush became a gold boom, creating population enough for permanent settlement to be viable. This led to the creation of a pipeline some 600km in length to ensure the constant supply of water that the extraction of gold – and its miners – required. The regional centre, the handsome city of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, is testament to the wealth that gold brought, with its wide streets and substantial Victorian buildings; it retains the Wild West feel of a city on the edge. Settlement of more remote goldfields was more difficult with the constant threat of drought, and tedious hardship for the shanty-dwelling miners, searching for that elusive nugget. The ghost towns of these less-fortunate mining endeavours scatter the landscape, bearing eerie witness to the victory of the land over its early colonists.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Roam **Kalgoorlie-Boulder** (p154) with its eclectic architecture, raucous pubs and enormous mining operations
- Walk the shimmering hard-salt surface of **Lake Ballard** (p161) to view sculptor Antony Gormley's 51 haunting figures, based on the residents of nearby Menzies
- Explore the eerie ghost town of **Gwalia** (p161) and others in the goldfields
- Learn how gold fortunes were made and lost in a tiny glint of decades, along the **Golden Quest Discovery Trail** (p160)
- Drive the **Eyre Hwy** (p164), Australia's greatest sealed-road endurance test, across the Nullarbor Plain from Perth to Adelaide
- Bird-watch, and walk in the footsteps of explorer Edward John Eyre, at the renowned **Eyre Bird Observatory** (p167)
- Walk along the lonely **Great Australian Bight** (p167)
- Climb the shifting sand dunes engulfing the old telegraph station at **Eucla** (p168)



## THE SOUTHERN OUTBACK



## Getting There & Away

Travelling to Kalgoorlie-Boulder is easy; pretty much everywhere else, you'll need a car.

### AIR

**SkyWest Airlines** (☎ 1300 660 088; www.skywest.com.au) and **Qantas** (☎ 13 13 13; www.qantas.com.au) fly between Kalgoorlie-Boulder and Perth at least twice daily. There are also regular SkyWest flights from Perth to Laverton, Leinster, Leonora and Wiluna.

### BUS

**Perth-Goldfields Express** (☎ 1800 620 440; www.goldrushtours.com.au) does the Perth–Kalgoorlie trip (adult one-way \$70) most days, going on to Leonora and Laverton once or twice weekly.

The same company offers the **Goldrush Tours Golden Triangle Tour**, a hop-on, hop-off bus pass (\$475) that covers transport between Perth, Margaret River and the southwest coast and forests, Albany and Esperance on the south coast, and to Kalgoorlie.

### TRAIN

**Transwa** (☎ 1300 662 205; www.transwa.wa.gov.au) runs the **Prospector** train service from Perth to Kalgoorlie-Boulder daily (one-way adult/child \$72/35, seven hours). It's wise to book, as this service is popular.

The **Indian Pacific**, run by **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au), also goes through Kalgoorlie-Boulder four times a week (twice to Perth and twice from Perth).

# EASTERN GOLDFIELDS

## KALGOORLIE-BOULDER

☎ 08 / pop 28,900

Kalgoorlie-Boulder ('Kal' to the locals) is one of Australia's great outback success stories. A long, dry and dusty 600km from Perth, it remains a prosperous and productive gold town in its own right, as well as service centre for the burgeoning mining industry's remoter outposts. Its wide streets and well-preserved Victorian buildings are testament to its early wealth and colourful history.

In 1893 Paddy Hannan, a prospector, set out from Coolgardie for another gold strike with a couple of Irish mates and stopped at the site of Kalgoorlie. He found enough gold lying on the surface to spark another rush. As in so many places, the surface gold soon dried up, but at Kalgoorlie the miners went deeper and more gold was found, leading the area into a long boom period. After WWI, however, increasing production costs and static gold prices led to Kalgoorlie's slow but steady decline.

In 1934 there were bitter race riots in twin towns Kalgoorlie and Boulder. On 29 and 30 January that year, mobs of disgruntled Australians roamed the streets, upset at the preference supposedly being given by shift bosses to workers of southern-European descent, and angrily setting fire to foreign-owned businesses and shooting at anyone deemed to be a foreigner.

Large mining conglomerates have been at the forefront of new open-cut mining operations in the Golden Mile east of Kal. It's probably the wealthiest gold-mining locale for its size in the world.

Kalgoorlie-Boulder represents Australia's raw edge, and has the feel of a US 'Wild West' frontier town. Several brothels and pubs attest to the city's function, the same since the 1890s, as a prosperous mining centre. At one stage there were 93 pubs, and the amount of alcohol consumed here is twice the state average.

Come September, the town is packed with visitors from all over WA and further afield for the annual Kalgoorlie-Boulder Racing Round. Everybody gets frocked up and very drunk to watch horses race around the red, red dirt in Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Broad Arrow and other towns.

### Orientation

Although Kalgoorlie sprung up close to Paddy Hannan's original find, the mining emphasis soon shifted a few kilometres away to the Golden Mile, and the satellite town of Boulder developed to service this area. In 1989 the two towns formally merged.

The town centre in Kalgoorlie is a grid of broad, tree-lined streets. Hannan St, the main street flanked by imposing public buildings, is wide enough to turn a camel train – a necessity in turn-of-the-19th-century goldfield towns. You'll find most of the town's hotels, restaurants and offices on or close to Hannan St.

### WHERE WATER IS LIKE GOLD

With the discovery of gold it became clear to the Western Australia (WA) government that the large-scale extraction of the metal, the state's most important industry, was unlikely to continue in the Kalgoorlie goldfields without a reliable water supply. Stop-gap measures, such as huge condensation plants that produced distilled water from salt lakes, or bores that pumped brackish water from beneath the earth, provided temporary relief.

In 1898, however, the engineer CY O'Connor proposed a stunning solution: he would build a reservoir near Perth and construct a 556km pipeline to Kalgoorlie. This was well before the era of long oil pipelines, and his idea was opposed violently in parliament and regarded by some to be impossible, especially as the water had to go uphill all the way (Kalgoorlie is 400m higher than Perth). Nevertheless, the project was approved and the pipeline laid at breakneck speed.

In 1903 water started to pour into Kalgoorlie's newly constructed reservoir – a modified version of the same system still operates today. For O'Connor, however, there was no happy ending: long delays and continual criticism by those of lesser vision resulted in his suicide in 1902, less than a year before his scheme proved operational.

Today you can follow the path of the water on the National Trust's interpretive Golden Pipeline Heritage Trail, which runs along the Great Eastern Hwy between Perth and Kalgoorlie; pick up a brochure from any visitors centre or check out [www.goldenpipeline.com.au](http://www.goldenpipeline.com.au).

INFORMATION		SLEEPING	
DEC Office	1 B3	Broadwater Hotel & Apartments	14 C5
Department of Indigenous Affairs	2 B3	Goldlust Backpackers YHA	15 A4
Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital	3 B2	Hannan's View Motel	16 A4
Netzone	4 B3	Kalgoorlie Backpackers	17 A4
Post Office	(see 1)	Palace Hotel	18 B3
RACV/A Office	5 C3	Quest Yelverton Kalgoorlie	19 B4
Visitors Centre	6 B4	Railway Motel	20 B3
		York Hotel	21 B3

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES		EATING	
City Markets	7 B3	Acropolis Shishkebabs	22 B3
Gallery at the Goldfields Arts Centre	(see 8)	Barista 202	23 B3
Goldfields Arts Centre	8 C3	Blue Monkey Restaurant	(see 16)
Goldrush Tours	9 B4	Hoover Café	(see 18)
Hay Street Brothels	10 A4	Larcombe's Bar & Grill	(see 14)
Kalgoorlie Town Hall	(see 6)	Monty's	24 C3
Kalgoorlie Miner & Western Argus Building	11 C3	Paddy's Ale House	(see 28)
Langtrees 181	(see 10)	Saltimbocca	25 B3
Paddy Hannan's Statue	(see 6)	Top End Thai	26 C3
Questa Casa	(see 10)		
School of Mines Mineral Museum	12 B3	DRINKING	
Western Australia Museum Kalgoorlie-Boulder	13 C3	De Bernales	27 B3
		Exchange Hotel	28 B3
		Judd's	29 B4
		Paddy's Ale House	(see 28)
		Wild West Saloon	(see 28)

ENTERTAINMENT	
Ace Viewway Cinema	30 D6
Goldfields Arts Centre	(see 8)
Platform Bar	(see 18)
Sylvesters	31 C3

SHOPPING	
Coles	32 B3
Desert Art Shop	(see 13)
Goldfields Aboriginal Art Gallery	33 A4
K-Mart	(see 32)
Woolworths	34 B4

TRANSPORT	
Halfpenny Hire	35 A4

## Information

**Department of Environment & Conservation** (DEC;

☎ 9021 2677; post office bldg, 204 Hannan St)

**Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital** (☎ 9080 5888; Piccadilly St)

**Netzone** (☎ 9022 8342; St Barbara's Sq) Fast internet access in a central location.

**Post office** (204 Hannan St)

**Royal Automobile Club of Western Australia Office** (RACWA; ☎ 131 703; cnr Hannan & Porter Sts)

**Visitors centre** (☎ 9021 1966; www.kalgoorlie.com; cnr Hannan & Wilson Sts; ☎ 8.30am-5pm, 9am-5pm Sat & Sun) Stop by the town hall building to pick up a good, free town map, pick the brains of the knowledgeable staff, and browse the excellent bookshop.

## Sights & Activities

### MINING HALL OF FAME

If you want to understand what makes this town tick, don't miss the excellent **Mining Hall of Fame** (☎ 9026 2700; www.mininghall.com; Eastern Bypass Rd; adult/child plus underground \$24/14, adult/child surface only \$17/9; ☎ 9am-4.30pm). Located on Hannan's North Heritage Mining Reserve, the site of Paddy Hannan's original lease and a working mine until 1952, it explores the mining industry from the underground up. You can go 36m below the surface in a mine shaft (and see why claustrophobics don't make good miners), pan for gold and be mesmerised by a gold pour, while kids of all ages will be kept well-occupied in the interactive Exploration Zone. A Garden of Remembrance, dedicated to the immigrant Chinese who worked the goldfields, is due to open here in 2007.

If you're into mining history, allow yourself a half-day here. There are underground tours at 10am, 12.15pm and 2.45pm (you need to wear fully enclosed shoes).

### WESTERN AUSTRALIA MUSEUM KALGOORLIE-BOULDER

The impressive Ivanhoe mine headframe at the northern end of Hannan St marks the entrance to this excellent **museum** (☎ 9021 8533; www.museum.wa.gov.au; 17 Hannan St; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-4.30pm). Check out the wide range of exhibits, including an underground gold vault and historic photographs, or join the free tours at 11am and 2pm. A lift takes you to a viewing point on the headframe, where you can look out over the city and mines and down into delightfully untidy backyards. The tiny British Arms Hotel (the narrowest hotel in Australia) is part of the museum.

### LOOPLINE RAILWAY MUSEUM

The Loopline railway was once the most important urban transport for Kalgoorlie and Boulder, with Boulder's Golden Mile station (1897) once the busiest in Western Australia (WA). While the railway closed – hopefully only temporarily – in 2004, its story is told in the **railway museum** (☎ 9093 3055; www.loopline.com.au; cnr Burt & Hamilton Sts; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 9am-1pm), operating out of the old train station.

### OTHER SIGHTS

Along Hannan St you'll find the imposing **town hall** and the equally impressive **post office**. There's an art gallery upstairs in the decorative town hall, while outside is a drinking fountain in the form of a **statue** of Paddy Hannan holding a water bag.

Northwest of Hannan St in Hay St is one of Kalgoorlie-Boulder's most notorious and popular attractions, the **Hay Street brothels**, now quietly acknowledged in the tourist brochures. Brothel tours have become de rigueur for many visitors to Kal, at **Langtrees 181** (☎ 9026 2181; www.langtrees.com; 181 Hay St; admission \$25; ☎ 1pm, 3pm and 6pm) and at Australia's oldest operating brothel, **Questa Casa** (☎ 9021 4897; 133 Hay St; admission \$18; ☎ 2pm).

See how the flying doctors look after the outback with the hourly tours at the **Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitor Centre** (☎ 9093 7595; Kalgoorlie-Boulder Airport; admission by donation; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri) be generous with your donation if you can, they do a fabulous job.

The **School of Mines Mineral Museum** (☎ 9088 6001; cnr Egan & Cassidy Sts; ☎ 8.30am-noon Mon-Fri; closed school holidays) has a geology display including replicas of big nuggets discovered in the area.

The **Goldfields War Museum** (☎ 9093 1083; 106 Burt St; admission free; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat-Sun) has a collection of local war memorabilia and military vehicles.

At the **Gallery at the Goldfields Arts Centre** (☎ 9088 6905; Cheetham St; ☎ 10am-3pm Mon-Fri, noon-3pm Sun) you'll find monthly exhibitions by local, state and national artists.

The view from the **Super Pit Lookout** (www.superpit.com.au; Outram St; ☎ 6am-7pm), just off the Goldfields Hwy in Boulder, is awesome, with the big trucks at the bottom of the huge hole looking like kids' toys. Good information is given in the on-site signs, and the **Super Pit Shop** (☎ 9093 3488; 2 Burt St; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) sells souvenirs and offers more detailed informa-

tion. The lookout is closed for an hour or so during the daily pit blast; the time is posted around town.

The **Goatcher Theatre Curtain** in the 1907 **Boulder town hall** (☎ 9021 9600; cnr Burt & Lane Sts, Boulder) has recently been restored. The Neapolitan scene was painted in 1908 by Englishman Philip W Goatcher, one of the great theatrical scene artists of the Victorian era. The *trompe l'oeil* curtain creates an extraordinary illusion of 3-D space, and is dropped from 10am to 3pm Wednesday, and on the third Sunday of each month (Boulder's market day) from 9.30am to 12.30pm.

**Hammond Park** (☎ 9021 1209; Lyall St; ☎ 9am-5pm), in the west of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, is a small fauna reserve with a miniature Bavarian castle, a 1903 rotunda and open-air movie screenings during summer.

The **Mt Charlotte Lookout** and the town's **reservoir** are a few hundred metres from the northeastern end of Hannan St, off the Goldfields Hwy. The view over the town is good, but there's little to see of the reservoir, which

is covered to limit evaporation. This reservoir is the culmination of the genius of engineer CY O'Connor (see the boxed text, p154) – the water in it took 10 days to get here from Perth's Mundaring Weir.

If you've had enough of holes in the ground, you can do your bit towards revegetating the bush in **Karlkurla Park**, northwest of town, by scattering a packet of native silky pear seeds (available at the visitors centre) while you enjoy the 4km of walking tracks.

## Tours

**Goldrush Tours** (☎ 9021 2954; www.goldrushtours.com.au; cnr Lane & Hay Sts) runs all sorts of tours, including half-day jaunts around Kalgoorlie-Boulder (adult/child \$25/5), as well as longer outback explorations.

You can see Kalgoorlie-Boulder and the Golden Mile mining operations from the air with **Goldfields Air Services** (☎ 9093 2116; www.goldfieldsairservices.com), based at the airport. Prices start from \$50 per person, with a minimum of two people.

## ARCHITECTURE, KALGOORLIE-BOULDER STYLE

As a young town, Kalgoorlie quickly reached fabled heights of prosperity. Its magnificent, enormous public buildings, erected at the turn of the 19th century, are evidence of its fabulous wealth. For a town better known for its love of beer, skimpies and horse racing, it boasts a fine collection of architectural styles. Nowhere is this better demonstrated than along Hannan St. You can expect to see curious blends of Victorian gold-boom, Edwardian, Moorish and Art-Nouveau styles, which have melded to produce a bizarre mix of ornate façades, colonnaded footpaths, recessed verandas, stuccoed walls and general overstatement.

The façade of the **York Hotel** (259 Hannan St) is one of Hannan St's most elaborate, with arches, bay windows, stucco and brick decoration, a pair of silver cupolas and a huge French-style square dome. The interior features a beautiful carved staircase. The hotel was built in 1900 and played host to many stage shows that came through Kalgoorlie.

The **Palace Hotel** (cnr Hannan & Maritana Sts) was designed to be the town's most luxurious hotel; all of its furnishings were brought in from Melbourne. The Palace was built from locally quarried stone and was the first hotel to have electric lighting. Former US president Herbert Hoover was a regular visitor during his mining youth.

The much-photographed **Exchange Hotel** (135 Hannan St), which stands just opposite the Palace Hotel, is one of Kalgoorlie-Boulder's most attractive pubs; its façade features a vast array of decorative elements, two-storey verandas, a corner tower and a corrugated, galvanised-iron roof.

The single-storey **City Markets** (272-280 Hannan St) has a triple-arched gateway topped by twin turrets. In the early 1900s the central covered courtyard was the home of greengrocers, butchers and fruiterers.

The old **Kalgoorlie Miner & Western Argus building** (125-127 Hannan St), built in 1900, was the first three-storey building in town. The upper storeys feature elaborate classical details. Kalgoorlie's first newspaper, the *Western Argus*, was published for the first time in 1894, only 17 months after gold was first discovered. The first edition of the *Kalgoorlie Miner* (still published) appeared in September 1895.

## Festivals & Events

The highlight of the social calendar is the annual **Kalgoorlie-Boulder Racing Round** in early September, when locals and a huge influx of visitors dress up to the nines to watch horses race on the red dirt.

On the third Sunday of each month, Boulder's Burt St is busy with the pleasantly low-key and community-centred **Boulder Market Day**, where morning tea with homemade scones, jam and cream in the town hall is an absolute must.

## Sleeping

### BUDGET

**Kalgoorlie Backpackers** (☎ 0412 110 001; 166 Hay St; dm/s/d \$20/35/50; 🚻 📺 📺) Partly located in a former brothel, this well-run hostel with a comfy TV lounge was part-occupied by long-stay contractors when we last visited and, like the YHA, is a good place to find out about work opportunities. It's opposite Kalgoorlie-Boulder's red-light action.

**Golddust Backpackers YHA** (☎ 9091 3737; gold.dust@westnet.com.au; 192 Hay St; dm/s/d \$24/35/55; 🚻 📺 📺) Also close to the Hay St strip, this hostel has clean, basic rooms, good communal areas including a games room, and noticeboards giving information about available work in town.

**Kalgoorlie Accommodation Village** (☎ 9039 4800; www.resortparks.com.au/kalgoorlie.asp; 286 Burt St; unpowered/poweredsites \$25/26, chalets \$89, units \$95; 🚻 📺 📺) This complex has great A-frame cabins, grassy sites, a kids' playground and pool, and is fully equipped for disabled travellers.

**Boulder Accommodation Village** (☎ 9093 1266; www.resortparks.com.au/boulder.asp; 201 Lane St; unpowered/poweredsites \$25/26, chalets \$89, units \$95; 🚻 📺 📺) The sister complex to Kalgoorlie Accommodation Village, and home to the same excellent facilities.

### MIDRANGE

**York Hotel** (☎ /fax 9021 2337; 259 Hannan St; s/d \$45/75) One of Kalgoorlie's most unique heritage buildings, this is a fascinating rabbit warren of high-ceilinged rooms and wooden staircases. It's good-value accommodation, with breakfast included.

**Palace Hotel** (☎ 9021 2788; www.palacehotel.com.au; cnr Hannan & Maritana Sts; s/d \$55/85, balcony s/d \$90/120, apt \$105; 🚻) Climb the magnificent old staircase to reach the accommodation wing, a rabbit warren of various styles of rooms.

**Hannan's View Motel** (☎ 9091 3333; www.hannans.view.com.au; 430 Hannan St; r \$105; 🚻) If you're in town for a while, this is a good central option with self-contained units, free in-house movies, and access to the town's Olympic pool and gym, a five-minute drive away.

### TOP END

**Railway Motel** (☎ 9088 0000; www.railwaymotel.com.au; 51 Forrest St; apt \$120; s/d \$130/142; 🚻 📺) This complex, opposite the train station and built on the site of the old hotel of the same name, is a cut above the average with bright, spruced-up rooms and comfy reclining chairs. Its two-bedroom apartments dotted around town are very good value.

**Broadwater Hotel & Apartments** (☎ 9080 0800; www.broadwaters.com.au; 21 Davidson St; r from \$160; 🚻 📺 📺) This stylish complex, in a residential area between Kalgoorlie and Boulder, boasts chichi rooms with big bathrooms and garden views.

**Quest Yelverton Kalgoorlie** (☎ 9022 8181; www.kalgoorlie.property.questwa.com.au; 210 Egan St; r \$165; 🚻 📺) Close enough to Hannan St to walk but far enough away to get a quiet night, the Yelverton's stylish, fully self-contained and serviced apartments have all you need – even a lap pool.

## Eating

**Barista 202** (☎ 9022 2228; 202 Hannan St; breakfast rolls \$4; 🚻) breakfast & lunch Mon-Sat, breakfast Sun) This buzzing café with great artwork on the walls is a welcome addition to the Kal scene. It serves Italian sandwiches and baked yummies to accompany good coffee.

**Acropolis Shishkebab** (86 Hannan St; mains \$8; 🚻) dinner) Racing-round regulars swear by these moreish kebabs as partying fuel.

**Hoover Café** (☎ 9021 2788; cnr Hannan & Maritana Sts; mains \$10; 🚻) lunch) Attached to the Palace Hotel, this café serves great-value home-cooked lunches – a mean homemade soup and sandwich is only \$10 – and morning and afternoon teas, with fresh-baked scones, until 6pm.

**Top End Thai** (☎ 9091 4027; 71 Hannan St; mains \$15-19; 🚻) dinner Mon-Sat) The service is guaranteed to be eccentric and the food tongue-tingling good at this stalwart of the Kal dining scene.

**Paddy's Ale House** (☎ 9021 2833; Exchange Hotel, 135 Hannan St; mains \$15-28) With a wide range of tap beers, Paddy's serves up classic counter meals like bangers and mash to the hordes; \$17 buffet dinners are great value.

**Monty's** (☎ 9022 8288; cnr Hannan & Porter Sts; mains \$15-30; 🚻) 24hr) The servings of standard café fare here are ginormous and, even better, they're available round the clock.

**Larcombe's Bar & Grill** (☎ 9080 0800; Broadwater Hotel & Apartments, 21 Davidson St; mains \$18-28; 🚻) breakfast, lunch & dinner) It's worth the drive from the centre of town to sip a decent coffee or wine on the veranda, and eat at this award-winning restaurant.

**Blue Monkey** (☎ 9091 3311; 418 Hannan St; mains \$23-33; 🚻) breakfast & dinner Mon-Sat, breakfast & lunch Sun) Start the day in the courtyard with a cooked breakfast (\$15) and creamy coffee, and end it with a good glass of wine and Mod-Oz meal.

**Saltimbocca** (☎ 9022 8028; 90 Egan St; mains \$25; 🚻) dinner Mon-Sat) With starched white tablecloths, original artworks and a classic Italian menu, this bistro-style place is an appealing upmarket option.

## Drinking

Even at the height of drought, there's never a shortage of watering holes in Kal, where some 30 pubs await your custom. Don't be surprised if the female bar staff appear somewhat skimpily clad in underwear, suspenders and high heels – 'skimpies' are the norm here, and you'll need to pick your venue if you prefer your bar staff fully clothed.

**Wild West Saloon** (☎ 9021 2833; Exchange Hotel, 135 Hannan St) For an anthropological experience, the front bar at the Exchange Hotel provides a window into some locals' lives at all hours of the day, with skimpies, TV sports and mine workers chain-drinking.

**Paddy's Ale House** (☎ 9021 2833; Exchange Hotel, 135 Hannan St) At the back of the Exchange, this Irish-style pub is for punters discerning about the brand of amber fluid they're imbibing; big-screen sports-channel TVs abound.

**Judd's** (☎ 9021 3046; Kalgoorlie Hotel, 319 Hannan St) With hot-pink walls and windows that open onto the street, this bar is great for catching live bands or a lively night with mates.

**De Bernales** (☎ 9021 4534; 193 Hannan St) For as long as we can remember, De Bernales has been the place for a quietish drink amid the Hannan St hooplah.

## Entertainment

You can catch a flick in air-conditioned comfort at the **Ace Viewway Cinema** (☎ 9021 2199; Oswald St) or watch them under the stars at **Hammond Park** (p156) during summer.

Visiting artists perform regularly at the **Goldfields Arts Centre** (☎ 9088 6900; Cheetham St).

The gambling game two-up, beloved in the bush, is usually played somewhere in town each week; check at the visitors centre or see if **Fun-Time Two-Up** (☎ 9093 3467; Sheffield's Bar & Grill, cnr Burt & Lionel Sts, Boulder) is happening.

**Platform Bar** (☎ 9021 2788; Palace Hotel, cnr Hannan & Maritana Sts) This is where big nights out in Kalgoorlie inevitably end, boogie-ing at this late-night bar.

**Sylvesters** (☎ 9021 1036; 52 Hannan St) Kal's long-suffering nightclub is at the top end of Hannan St; the building was up for lease when we last visited, so the club may or may not survive the change of owner.

## Shopping

The **Goldfields Aboriginal Art Gallery** (☎ 9021 1710; 222 Dugan St) sells paintings and crafts, as does the **Desert Art Shop** (☎ 9091 5505; 9 Hannan St) next to the museum, where artists may be working when you drop by.

Kalgoorlie-Boulder is a good place to buy gold services fashioned into relatively inexpensive jewellery – shop along Hannan St.

Coles, K-Mart and Woolworths supermarkets, all on Hannan St, are the places to stock up for those outback trips.

## Getting There & Away

See p153 for information about bus and train services to Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

## Getting Around

Between Kalgoorlie and Boulder, there's a regular bus service from 7am to 6pm Monday to Friday and Saturday morning with **Trans-Goldfields** (☎ 9021 2655; adult/child \$1.90/80c). Pick it up from the local bus stops on Hannan St.

If you want to explore further afield, you'll have to drive, hitch or take a tour as public transport is limited. You can rent cars from many companies, including **Hertz** (☎ 9093 2211), **Budget** (☎ 9093 2300) and **Avis** (☎ 9021 1722), all located at the airport, and **Halfpenny Hire** (☎ 9021 1804; Hannan St).

## COOLGARDIE

☎ 08 / pop 1500

Today you wouldn't pick that the quiet, dusty town of Coolgardie was once the third-biggest town in WA. These days it's a pause in the long journey to or from the Nullarbor Plain, or a daytrip from Kal, 39km to the east.

A reef of gold was discovered here in 1892 by the prospector Arthur Bayley and his mate Bill Ford, and called 'Bayley's Reward'. By the end of the 19th century, the population of Coolgardie had boomed to 15,000. There were two stock exchanges, six newspapers, more than 20 hotels and three breweries. You only have to glance at the huge town hall, courthouse and post-office building to appreciate the size that Coolgardie once was, or potter around the side streets and read the many heritage plaques outside houses and other public buildings. The gold then petered out and the town withered away quickly. During the boom of the 1990s, when world gold prices went up and mines were reopened, the population grew to around 2000, but has since declined.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 9026 6090; Warden's Court, Bayley St; ☎ 9am-noon & 12.30-4pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat & Sun) sells a decent selection of local history books. The **Goldfields Museum** (adult/child \$3.50/2), in the same building and with the same hours, has a sizable display of goldfields memorabilia, along with information about former US president Herbert Hoover's days on the WA goldfields in Gwalia.

**Warden Finnerty's Residence** (☎ 9026 6028; 2 McKenzie St; adult/child \$3.50/2; ☎ 11am-4pm Thu-Tue) was built for Coolgardie's first mining warden and magistrate, John Michael Finnerty, and the house has been beautifully restored by the National Trust.

One kilometre west of Coolgardie is the **town cemetery**, which includes the graves of explorer Ernest Giles (1835-97) and several Afghan camel drivers. Due to the unsanitary conditions and violence on the goldfields, it's said that 'one half of the population buried the other half'. The old **pioneer cemetery** (Forrest St) was used from 1892 to 1894.

At the **Camel Farm** (☎ 9026 6159; Great Eastern Hwy; adult/child \$4.50/2; ☎ 10am-4pm school & public holidays, or by appointment), 3km west of town, you can take short camel rides (from \$5.50) or organise longer treks.

About 30km south of Coolgardie, on Rock Rd, is **Gnarlbine Rocks**, an important watering point for the early prospectors. **Victoria Rock Nature Reserve**, with primitive camping, is a further 18km south.

It's best to use your own wheels to get to and around Coolgardie, but you can hook up with the daily **Perth-Goldfields Express** (☎ 1800 620 440; www.goldrushtours.com.au) on its way between

### GOLDEN TRAIL

If you're feeling a little adventurous, consider the **Golden Quest Discovery Trail** (www.goldenquesttrail.com). The 965km trail starts its exploration of the region's gold industry in Coolgardie, heads northwards through gold-mining ghost towns towards Leonora and Laverton, then turns south and finishes at Kalgoorlie-Boulder, passing 25 interpretive sites along the way. These reveal some fascinating characters and events and, while in good weather the route is accessible to all vehicles, more than half of the road is unsealed so you should ask about road conditions and safe travel tips before you set off. You can buy the accompanying CD-ROM and book (\$40) from most visitors centres in the area.

Perth and Kalgoorlie-Boulder, or get a ride with **Goldfields Transport** (☎ 9021 2655), which runs a school bus between Kal and Coolgardie (adult/child \$5.70/2.20).

### NORTH OF KALGOORLIE-BOULDER

The road north is surfaced from Kalgoorlie-Boulder to the three 'Ls' – the mining towns of Leonora (237km north), Laverton (367km northeast) and Leinster (372km north). Off the main road, however, traffic is virtually nonexistent and rain can quickly close unsealed roads. There are several towns of interest along the way – including Kanowna, Broad Arrow, Ora Banda, Menzies and Kookynie. Beyond Leinster, remote Wiluna (540km north of Kal) is a true outback town.

**Perth-Goldfields Express** (☎ 1800 620 440; www.goldrushtours.com.au) has a weekly bus service from Perth to Leonora and Laverton via Kalgoorlie (see p153), and in the reverse direction.

### Kanowna, Broad Arrow & Ora Banda

☎ 08

**Kanowna** is the most easily accessible of the goldfields ghost towns, 18km from Kalgoorlie-Boulder. In 1905 it had a population of 12,000, 16 hotels, two breweries, many churches and an hourly train service to Kalgoorlie. Today the population is zero, and apart from the train station platform and the odd pile of rubble, nothing remains except a grid of dusty streets and some information signs. A couple of kilometres south of the township site is the

interesting and isolated old cemetery, which includes two early headstones of a Japanese prostitute and miner killed in a local scandal. It was relocated away from town when the original graveyard was found to be sitting atop a rich vein of gold!

Kanowna is now the starting point for the annual fund-raising **Balzano barrow race**, during which teams dress up and push a miner's barrow to Kalgoorlie-Boulder, in the tradition of James Balzano, who arrived at Kanowna in 1896 carrying all his worldly possessions on a primitive wheelbarrow made out of saplings and packing-case wood. The race is held in September or October and is organised by the local rotary club (www.hannansrotary.com).

**Broad Arrow**, 38km north of Kal, was featured in *The Nickel Queen*, the first full-length feature film made in WA. It is a shadow of its former self – at the beginning of the 20th century it had a population of 2400; now there's just one pub and a couple of derelict-looking houses.

**Ora Banda**, 28km west of the Goldfields Hwy beyond Broad Arrow, has shrunk from a population of 2000 to less than 50. After a notorious pub-bombing in 2000, much of the original 1911 **Ora Banda Historic Inn** (☎ 9024 2444) has been rebuilt, local memorabilia adorns the walls, and an original three-way open fireplace keeps the pub cosy in winter. It's open for business, resplendent with a new beer garden and serving lunch and dinner daily; accommodation was being (re)constructed during 2006.

### Lake Ballard, Menzies & Kookynie

☎ 08

Travellers continue to pass through Menzies, around 132km north of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, on the way to see British artist Antony Gormley's haunting **sculptures on Lake Ballard**, an isolated salt lake on a dirt road 51km north of town. The strange silhouettes of 51 carbonised steel figures (created from body scans of Menzies' residents) appear through the shifting mirage of the glittering salt and are quite beautiful. Check road conditions at the Caltex service station in Menzies, take plenty of drinking water and allow yourself a couple of hours to wander through this fantastic installation, created for the 2003 Perth International Arts Festival.

**Menzies** is another typical tiny goldfields town. At its height it had 10,000 people in

1905, and many early buildings remain, including the **train station** with its 120m platform (1898), and the imposing **town hall** (1896). **Menzies Hotel** (☎ 9024 2043; 22 Shenton St; s/d \$48/65, donga \$60) has *extremely* dilapidated old-style hotel rooms as well as very basic dongas.

A better accommodation option is the **Grand Hotel** (☎ 9031 3010; s/d \$58/93) at the gold ghost town of **Kookynie**. Midway between Menzies and Leonora, on a good dirt road about 25km east of and parallel to the highway, this magnificent old country pub is full of local character. Quiet **Niagara Dam**, 10km from Kookynie, built with cement hauled by a 400-strong camel train, is now a top bush camping spot, with walk trails, wildlife gathering around the water, and good interpretive signs.

### Leonora & Gwalia

☎ 08 / pop 1500

The mining and pastoral service centre of **Leonora** is 237km north of Kalgoorlie-Boulder and serves as the railhead for the nickel from Windarra and Leinster. Climb **Tank (Smoodgers) Hill** for a good view of the town, and check out the old public buildings on the main street near the **visitors centre** (☎ 9037 6044; www.leonora.wa.gov.au; Tower St; ☎ 9am-5pm). It's beside the Telecentre if you want to check email.

If you need to stay the night, try the **Leonora Caravan Park** (☎ 9037 6568; Rochester St; unpowered/powered sites \$10/20, on-site vans \$32), or the **Central Hotel** (☎ 9037 6042; Tower St; budget/motel r \$45/93), where the motel rooms are self-contained and counter meals are served in the lounge bar.

Just 4km southwest of town, **Gwalia Historic Site** was occupied in 1896 and deserted pretty much overnight in 1963, after the pit closed.

### IN THE PRESIDENT'S BEDROOM

A rather unique B&B experience is offered at Gwalia's **Hoover House** (☎ 9037 7122; www.gwalia.org.au; r from \$100). The three exquisitely restored bedrooms – with private use of the house verandas and gardens after the museum gates are closed at 4pm – are gorgeous. Herbert Hoover's room was probably the one overlooking the awesome open pit and – in the foreground – the croquet lawn; an optional rustic summer sunset bath, in the great outdoors with glass of wine to hand, adds just that little extra.

With houses and household goods intact, it's an eerie, fascinating ghost town. On the hillside above the wander-through townsite, the **museum** (☎ 9037 7122; adult/child \$5/2; ☹ 10am-4pm) has more weird and wonderful *stuff* in it than we've ever seen, and **Hoover House** – the beautifully restored 1898 mine manager's house, named for the first Gwalia mine manager who later became 31st President of the United States – is stunning.

## Wiluna

☎ 08 / pop 300

Some 300km north of Leonora, the remote town of Wiluna, formerly a gold-mining town, is now an administrative centre with a mainly Aboriginal population. The **shire office** (☎ 9981 7010; www.wiluna.wa.gov.au; Scotia St), in the restored old hospital building, provides essential visitor info for those heading off on the Canning Stock Route (below), and is the setting for the unexpectedly fabulous **Tjukurba Art Gallery**. If you've found the experience of being in Wiluna somewhat uneasy and confronting, this great exhibition of local Aboriginal art shows a different perspective of the lives of community members; it's as good as (and sells for lower prices than) most indigenous art galleries in Australia.

Most travellers come to Wiluna in a 4WD en route to or from the Canning Stock Route or Gunbarrel Hwy, and overnight at the **Wiluna Club Hotel** (☎ 9981 7012; unpowered/powerd sites \$15/23, hotel r \$55, motel r \$88), which has all the splendid contradictions of a classic outback pub. Souvenir stubby-holders in the bar are emblazoned with bare-breasted women while, in an old-fashioned dining-room with hanging lamps and lace tablecloths, a grandmotherly woman serves enormous platters of standards like roast lamb (\$22). It's not a flash experience but it's authentic and, as the poem at the bar says, '...there's nowhere else you can go'.

## Canning Stock Route & Gunbarrel Highway

Wiluna is the start or finish point of two of Australia's greatest 4WD adventures – the Canning Stock Route and the Gunbarrel Hwy. *Canning Stock Route – A Traveller's Guide* by R&E Gard (2004) is the drivers' bible for the Canning, and HEMA maps' detailed *Great Desert Tracks – North West Sheet* is a must for both.

The **Canning Stock Route** runs about 1800km southwest from Halls Creek to Wiluna, crossing the Great Sandy and Gibson Deserts. As the track has not been maintained for more than 30 years it's a route to be taken seriously and, if you're starting from Wiluna, pick up comprehensive road and safety information from the shire offices.

Taking the old **Gunbarrel Highway** (to the north of the Great Central Rd) from Wiluna to Warakuna near the Northern Territory (NT) border is a long, rough trip through lots of sand dunes. Like the Canning, it's suggested that for safety you drive this in convoy with other vehicles and you need to take all supplies – including fuel and water for the duration – with you. Let the police posts at either end of both tracks know your movements.

## Laverton

☎ 08 / pop 1100

From Leonora you turn northeast to Laverton, a mining service town some 360km north of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, where the surfaced road ends. The cheery **visitors centre** (☎ 9031 1750; lavertontourist@westnet.com.au; Laver Pl) is combined with the library and internet access at the Telecentre. Laverton marks the start of the **Great Central Road** to Yulara (a tourist development near Uluru) via Warburton. Expect to overnight and/or stock up on supplies of fuel and water here, and *definitely* check at the visitors centre for current road conditions.

If you're looking for somewhere to camp, the **Laverton Caravan Park** (☎ 9031 1072; unpowered/powerd sites \$10/20; chalets \$80) is the only option. **Desert Inn Hotel** (☎ 9031 1188; r \$80) has rooms attached to the town's only pub, where you can also get a counter meal, and **Laverton Motel** (☎ 9031 1130; apt \$110), a series of tatty (but self-contained, clean-enough, and big) recycled miners' units, is great value for families or small groups.

## Great Central Road (Outback Way)

For those interested in a genuine outback experience, the unsealed Great Central Rd (officially renamed, in 2005, 'Outback Way' but as yet rarely known as such) provides rich scenery of red sand, spinifex, mulga and desert oaks. From Laverton it is a mere 1132km to Yulara and 1710km to Alice Springs.

The road, while sandy and corrugated in places, is suitable for all vehicles, though it can

## PERMITS, PLEASE

The Great Central Rd traverses various pockets of Aboriginal land, and you need a permit to travel along it. If you're crossing the Northern Territory border, allow three weeks for the paperwork; contact the **Aboriginal Lands Trust** (☎ 08-9235 8000; Cloisters Sq) in Perth or the **Central Land Council** (☎ 08-8951 6320) in Alice Springs. If you're only travelling on the Western Australia (WA) side, you can get a permit online and instantly at the website of WA's **Department of Indigenous Affairs** (DIA; www.dia.wa.gov.au and link to 'entry permits'). In Kalgoorlie the **DIA office** (☎ 9021 5666; cnr Brookman & Cassidy Sts) can help with any last-minute queries.

be closed for days after rain. Diesel is available at roughly 300km intervals on the WA side, as is Opal fuel which, at the Warburton and Warakuna roadhouses, can be used instead of unleaded petrol. (Opal is unsmiffable, and its provision is one of the measures in place to counteract petrol-sniffing problems in local communities.)

Coming from Laverton, the three WA roadhouses – all of which provide food, fuel and limited mechanical services – are **Tjukayirla** (☎ 9037 1108; tjukayirla@bigpond.com) at 315km, **Warburton** (☎ 8956 7656) at 567km and **Warakuna** (☎ 8956 7344) at 798km. All have a range of

accommodation, from camping (around \$10 per person), to budget rooms (around \$40) and self-contained units (around \$100); you should book ahead, as rooms are limited.

At Warburton take time to visit the **Tjulyuru Cultural & Civic Centre** (☎ 8956 7966; www.tjulyuru.com; ☹ 8am-5pm Mon-Fri), near the roadhouse; the art gallery contains an extensive collection of Warburton Aboriginal paintings. At **Giles**, 231km northeast of Warburton and 105km west of the NT border, there is a meteorological station which runs a tour daily at 8am.

Note that Warakuna, Warburton and Giles run on Northern Territory time, which is 1½ hours ahead of WA time.

## SOUTH OF KALGOORLIE-BOULDER Norseman

☎ 08 / pop 1600

To most people, Norseman is simply the crossroads town where you turn east for the journey across the Nullarbor, south to Esperance or north to Kalgoorlie and Perth. Named not for a Scandinavian but for the prospector's horse that went lame in 1894 on a nugget of gold in its hoof, the town still has active gold mines.

The **visitors centre** (☎ 9039 1071; www.norseman.info; 68 Roberts St; ☹ 9am-5pm) has good public showers and is a mine of information about the Nullarbor trek; if you've just done the big trip, staff can issue you with your very own certificate to show the folks back home. A Telecentre is close by.

## MESSAGE STICK *Virginia Jealous*

I'd hoped to catch up with a friend of friend, a policeman in Kalgoorlie. But he was working out bush, about 1000km away, more than half of it along a red dirt road. That's OK, I was going out bush that way too, we'd meet up in a few days.

Then it started to rain. Not just any old rain, but the first rain of the year. It was July. I sat in a motel, waiting for the rain to stop. It didn't. I drove to the edge of the dirt and looked at the waterlogged road. Then a bloke came and put out the 'road closed' sign. So I turned around.

I was (of course) out of mobile phone range. He had a satellite phone, its number unknown to me. Even if I had known it, many of the phone boxes were out of order in the occasional small town or roadhouse I passed. He rang our mutual friend, who phoned and emailed me. I was still out of range and away from internet. Some days later, back in town, I read and heard his messages. They said:

"Good call not to go on. Road still closed. People ignoring 'road closed' signs. Vehicles slipping and rolling over. People injured. We're out there fetching them and slipping all over the place too. Why DO they do it?!"

I don't know the answer to that. But I thought if I got the chance to tell the policeman's story, I would. And, next time, maybe get a sat phone.

The **Historical & Geological Collection** (☎ 9039 1593; Battery Rd; adult/child \$2/1; ☎ 10am-1pm Mon, Wed, Thu & Fri or by request), in the quaint old School of Mines building, has items from the gold-rush days.

There's an excellent view of the town and surrounding salt lakes from the well-signposted **Beacon Hill Mararoa Lookout**, over the more than 4.2 million tonnes of mountainous tailings. Be sure to take a break and do this; there are excellent interpretive signs at the lookout about this extraordinary landscape, and a short loop walk track on the hillside to stretch those car-weary legs.

### SLEEPING & EATING

**Gateway Caravan Park** (☎/fax 9039 1500; 23 Prinsep St; unpowered/powered sites \$18.50/23, on-site vans \$49, cabins \$69-89; ☎) Good cabins and a bushy atmosphere make this a reliable option.

**Lodge 101** (☎ 9039 1541; 101 Prinsep St; dm/s/d \$25/35/55) After the relentless road, this colourful house – with friendly owners, clean and comfortable rooms and knick-knacks galore – is a cheery place to rest your cramped bones.

**Great Western Motel** (☎ 9039 1633; Prinsep St; s/d \$90/140; ☎) If you're looking for cool respite, try these motel rooms with rammed-earth walls and a leafy setting. There's a restaurant on-site.

There's not exactly a huge choice of eating options here, but you could try the reliable **Tin Camel Café** (Prinsep St), beside the tin camels on the roundabout, of course, or the 24-hour café at the BP service station, where the food ain't exotic but it's available round the clock and eaten in a 1950s-style area with red vinyl booths.

## EYRE HIGHWAY (THE NULLARBOR)

It's a little more than 2700km between Perth and Adelaide – not much less than the distance from London to Moscow – across the vast and legendary **Nullarbor Plain**, and the long and sometimes lonely Eyre Hwy that crosses its southern edge. Nullarbor is bad Latin for 'no trees', but it's not entirely barren; the road is flanked by vegetation most of the way, as this coastal fringe receives regular rain, especially in winter.

The road across the Nullarbor takes its name from Edward John Eyre, the explorer who made the first east-west crossing in 1841. It was a superhuman effort that took five months of hardship and resulted in the death of Eyre's companion, John Baxter. In 1877 a telegraph line was laid across the Nullarbor, hugging the coast and roughly delineating the route the first road would take.

Later that century, miners on their way to the goldfields followed the same telegraph line across the empty plain. In 1896 the first bicycle crossing was made and in 1912 the first car was driven across, but in the next 12 years only three more cars managed to traverse the southwest of the continent.

In 1941 WWII inspired the building of a transcontinental highway, just as it had the Alice Springs to Darwin route. It was a rough-and-ready track when completed, and in the 1950s only a few vehicles a day made the crossing. In the 1960s the traffic flow increased to more than 30 vehicles a day and in 1969 the WA government surfaced the road as far as the South Australia (SA) border. Finally, in 1976, the last stretch from the SA border was surfaced and now the Nullarbor crossing is a much easier drive, but still a long one.

The surfaced road runs close to the coast on the SA side. The Nullarbor region ends dramatically on the coast of the Great Australian Bight, at cliffs that drop steeply into the ocean. It's easy to see why this was a seafarer's nightmare, for a ship driven onto the coast would quickly be pounded to pieces against the cliffs, and climbing them would be a near impossibility.

From Norseman, where the Eyre Hwy begins, it's about 730km to the WA-SA border, near Eucla, and almost 500km further to Ceduna (the name from an Aboriginal word meaning 'a place to sit down and rest') in SA. From Ceduna, it's still about 800km to Adelaide via Port Augusta.

North of the Eyre Hwy, the **Trans-Australian Railway** runs across the Nullarbor Plain. One stretch of the railway runs dead straight for 478km – the longest piece of straight railway line in the world.

One of the most comprehensive publications to cover the journey is the free *The Nullarbor: Australia's Great Road Journey*, available from visitors centres throughout WA and SA.

### UNDER THE NULLARBOR

Beneath the uninhabited and barren landscape of the Nullarbor Plain lies a wealth of interest. The Nullarbor is an ancient limestone sea bed, up to 300m thick in places. About 20 million years ago, shells and marine organisms began to settle and some three million years ago the bed was gently raised, forming a huge plateau 700km long and up to 300km wide.

Within this raised plateau is Australia's largest network of caves, formed over the millennia as rain seeped through cracks in the surface limestone. The caves vary in size from shallow depressions to elaborate, deep caves with immense chambers. About 50 of the caves begin via passages in large sinkholes or dolines; others can be accessed only through narrow, vertical blowholes; many surface unexpectedly beside the 4WD tracks off the highway.

Perhaps best-known is **Cocklebiddy Cave**, 12km north of the Eyre Hwy, which has one of the longest underwater passages known in the world; in 1984 a team of French explorers set a record here for the deepest cave-dive in the world. The **Mullamullang Cave** east of Cocklebiddy is the most extensive cave network known in Australia and contains superb mineral formations known as the **Salt Cellars**. West of Eucla are the Weebubbie, Pannikin Plains and Abrakurrie Caves, which are completely off-limits because they are so unstable. The **Abrakurrie Cave** contains the largest chamber of the Nullarbor caves, 180m long and 45m wide and with a 40m-high ceiling. More caves exist on the South Australia (SA) side of the border.

As these caves are both unstable and unstaffed, they are not generally publicly accessible. You should *never* enter any of them without an experienced guide and proper safety gear. Many lives have been lost and the vertical access to a number of the caves requires highly specialised equipment; you have been warned.

Those keen to venture underground need permits; contact the Esperance office of the **Department of Environment & Conservation** (DEC; ☎ 9071 3733) or the SA **Department for the Environment and Heritage** (☎ 08-8625 3144) in Ceduna for more information.

### CROSSING THE NULLARBOR Bicycle

The Nullarbor Plain is a real challenge to cyclists. They are attracted by the barrenness and distance, certainly not by the interesting scenery. As you drive across you'll often see cyclists, at all times of the year, lifting their water bottles to their parched mouths or sheltering from the sun.

Excellent equipment is needed and adequate water supplies must be carried. Cyclists should also know where all the water tanks are located. Adequate protection (hats, lotions etc) from the sun should be used even in cloudy weather. The prevailing wind for

most of the journey is west to east, the most preferable direction to be pedalling.

### Bus & Train

Scheduled bus services no longer make the trip across the Nullarbor – cheap flights have made it uneconomical. If you want to make the trip by road but don't have a vehicle, your best option is probably to hang around and introduce yourself to travellers at the Norseman caravan park; the usual caveats about accepting (or giving) lifts to strangers apply.

The *Indian Pacific*, run by **Great Southern Railway** (☎ 13 21 47; www.trainways.com.au), provides one of the world's great train journeys (see p265).

### Car

While the Nullarbor is no longer a torture trail where cars get shaken to bits by potholes and corrugations, or where you're going to die of thirst waiting for help to turn up if you break down, it's still wise to prepare well.

The distance between fuel stops is about 200km, so your vehicle needs to be in good shape with good tyres. The cost of fuel varies greatly: it's cheaper in towns and ridiculously

### PEDAL POWER

Spare a thought for the first cyclist to cross the Nullarbor. Arthur Richardson set off from Coolgardie on 24 November 1896 with a small kit and water bag. Thirty-one days later he arrived in Adelaide having followed the telegraph line, on the way encountering hot winds, '100° in the shade' and 40km of sand hills west of Madura station.

expensive in tiny places in the outback, where you have no choice but to fill up. Mundrabilla and Eucla are generally the cheapest options (by far) for fuel on the WA side of the Nullarbor.

Carry more than enough drinking water – at least 4L per person – just in case you do have to sit it out by the road on a hot summer day. There are limited freshwater facilities between Norseman and Ceduna, and be aware that places listed as water stops may not in fact have any available.

There are no banking facilities between Norseman and Ceduna, but all roadhouses have Eftpos and take major credit cards, most have internet booths, and all have landline phones. Most mobile phones will be out of range for the duration.

Take it easy on the Nullarbor – plenty of people try to set speed records and plenty more have messed up their cars when they've run into kangaroos at night. There are many rest areas – make use of them!

Check out [www.nullarbor.net.au](http://www.nullarbor.net.au) for more information.

## Walking

The occasional fit and adventurous – and possibly stark-raving mad – soul (or should that be sole?) makes their way by foot across the Nullarbor. Needless to say this is not for the unprepared or fainthearted. Food drops must be organised well in advance, most solitary walkers push a trolley so that enough water can be carted, and speedy road-trains and vehicles are a real challenge. If you pass a walker, don't honk and give them a heart attack but stop and offer food or water if you can; they're sure to have a good story to tell in return.

## NORSEMAN TO COCKLEBIDDY

Midway between Norseman and Balladonia there are simple, good-value overnight options available just off the highway in the bush at **Fraser Range Station** (☎ 9039 3210; [www.fraserangestation.com.au](http://www.fraserangestation.com.au); unpowered/power sites \$15/25, budget s/d \$40/50, renovated r from \$75). Choose from camping to budget rooms to beautifully renovated rooms in the thick-walled old stone cottages of the former shearers' quarters; there are shared bathrooms and a well-equipped campers kitchen.

From Norseman, the first roadhouse you reach is **Balladonia**, 191km to the east. The small cultural heritage museum here displays themes such as Afghan camel drivers, Aboriginal settlement and the crash landing of the US National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA) Skylab in the 1970s; the museum was closed when we last visited, but should reopen in 2007. The **Balladonia Hotel Motel** (☎ 9039 3453; [www.users.bigpond.com/balladonia](http://www.users.bigpond.com/balladonia); unpowered/power sites \$13/17, dm \$17, s/d from \$85/99; ☎) offers a decent plate of daily specials for \$12.50.

Balladonia to Cocklebiddy, some 210km, is a lonely section. The first 160km to **Caiguna** includes one of the world's longest stretches of straight road – 145km, the so-called Ninety Mile Straight. If you can't face any more road, stay the night here at the **John Eyre Motel** (☎ 9039 3459; unpowered/power sites \$12/18, s/d with shared bathroom \$58/73, s/d \$83/99; ☎).

There's a decent playground for kids and shaded picnic tables at **Cocklebiddy**. The **Cocklebiddy Wedgetail Inn** (☎ 9039 3462; unpowered/power sites \$13/19, standard s/d \$82/99; ☎) has fuel, a licensed restaurant and snack bar; some budget rooms are also planned. Cocklebiddy runs on Central Western time – 45 minutes ahead of Perth time, and 45 minutes behind Adelaide time.

## BONZER BACKROADS – BRUMBIES, BUSH & BULL DUST

For those travelling east across the Nullarbor, two back roads, which meet about 80km south of the Eyre Hwy, lead from east of Esperance to Balladonia. The **Balladonia Track** via Mt Ragged (299km total from Esperance) is a *really* rough 4WD route north of Cape Arid; heavy rain can close this road, so check before setting out, and be well prepared. The **Parmango Rd** (262km total from Esperance) starts at Condingup. It's bumpy but passable to 2WDs when dry (watch out for bull dust in the potholes), but becomes instantly impassable except to 4WDs after rain; check its condition with the Department of Environment & Conservation (DEC) before heading out. It's a good bush road, with the possibility of brumbies and camels alongside the track and the old Balbinia Homestead 20km off the track. Enjoy the (interactive, if you choose) underwear artwork on the gates! There's no fuel or water on either of these roads, and **DEC** (☎ 9071 3733) in Esperance has a good set of informal notes – practicalities and history – on each.

**Twilight Cove**, 30km south of Cocklebiddy, is the dramatic point at which the limestone escarpment cliffs of the Nullarbor meet the sea; the cove attracts whales in season and is a good spot to bush camp and fish. It's accessed by a very rough 4WD track, and you need to know what you're doing to drive there; ask directions at the Cocklebiddy roadhouse.

## Eyre Bird Observatory

South of Cocklebiddy is the unexpected treat of **Eyre Bird Observatory** (☎ 9039 3450; [www.eyrebirds.org](http://www.eyrebirds.org)). The observatory, on the coast some 50km from Cocklebiddy and established by Birds Australia in 1977, is staffed by volunteers and housed in the sprawling old Eyre telegraph station – a magnificent 1897 limestone building with an extraordinary history – in Nuytsland Nature Reserve. Surrounded by mallee scrubland, it looks out on to spectacular roving sand dunes which – in a lesson learned from the former Eucla telegraph station, engulfed by sand many years ago – are being stabilised by innovative use of kelp from the beach, and the hand-broadcast of seeds collected from surrounding vegetation. The waters of the **Great Australian Bight** are just a walk away through the dunes.

This is the perfect place to enjoy a wide range of desert plants and animals, and the stories of people – like the great explorer Edward John Eyre – who've passed through them; a night here is great value (see below). There are several walking tracks, bird baths where some of the 240 locally identified species can be seen, and regular beach birdcounts. There's also a dusty museum of telegraph memorabilia, an interactive display of the Morse code the telegraphists used, and

an active weather station where three daily readings are taken for the Australian meteorological office.

Accommodation is \$85 per person per night and includes all meals; seniors and members of Birds Australia and YHA get a discount. Meals are eaten family-style on the wide verandas in summer or around an open wood fire in the eclectic library-cum-living room in winter. The bathroom is shared, water conservation is a high priority (so BYO linen if you can), and the power is mostly solar. There's no camping here, in order to protect these resources as well as the fragile sand dune environment.

Day visitors are welcome (\$10 per vehicle), but the last 10km are soft sand and are 4WD-accessible only. If you are in a 2WD and are overnighing, the wardens will pick you up from the observatory car park, 14km off the Eyre Hwy; bookings are essential.

Eyre runs on 'Eyre time' – one hour ahead of Perth, 30 minutes behind Adelaide.

## COCKLEBIDDY TO EUCLA

The journey between Cocklebiddy and Eucla is around 270km.

Some 83km east of Cocklebiddy is **Madura**, close to the hills (yes, hills!) of the Hampton Tablelands. At one time, horses were bred here for the Indian army. You get good views over the plains from the road. The ruins of the **Old Madura Homestead**, several kilometres west of the new homestead by a dirt track, have some old machinery and other equipment. If you need a cool night's sleep, the standard rooms at the **Madura Pass Oasis Inn** (☎ 9039 3464; unpowered/power sites \$12/20, budget s/d \$63/73, standard s/d \$84/105; ☎) are air-conditioned, the

## THE LESSON OF THE HEADLESS TRAVELLER

'There's a mysterious grave a good half-day's walk from the Telegraph Station. Four rusted 1877 pole-bases create, with old telegraph wire, a fenced off rectangle; a rough unmarked cross is wired together at one end. The body had no head. No head, no words, no story.'

Helen Gee, temporary warden of the Eyre Bird Observatory and co-founder of the Tasmanian Wilderness Society (a woman, then, who knows about the bush), pauses.

'I love the notion of the headless traveller. There's an analogy I want to take with me from Eyre; that this place, and others as remote, are places we can travel 'without our head'. We can leave mental baggage behind, and start to look at the world afresh. I've learnt from scratch a whole lot of new things. About birds, about weather recording, about whales and sand dunes. Here there's only the scarp, the mallee, the sand track to the great dunes, the waves rolling in, the ribbed sky lighting up at sunset. It's easier here to see things for what they are. I guess one of the lessons I've learned is to leave my head behind, and do it frequently!'



camp site is shady and the pool is welcome in summer.

**Mundrabilla** is on the lower coastal plain. At the roadhouse the ordinary **Mundrabilla Motor Hotel** (☎ 9039 3465; Eyre Hwy; s/d \$69/85; 🚽) is the accommodation option; fill up with cheap(ish) fuel here if you're heading west. Heading east, it's about 65km to Eucla.

## EUCLA & BEYOND

Just before the SA border is **Eucla**, which has picturesque ruins of an old **telegraph repeater and weather station**, first opened in 1877 and closed in 1927. The telegraph line now runs along the railway line, far to the north. The lonely telegraph station, 4km from the Eucla roadhouse, has been mostly engulfed by the sand dunes. The dunes around Eucla in the 33-sq-km **Eucla National Park** are a truly spectacular sight, as is the high limestone **Wilson Bluff**; get directions for this track from the Border Village. The mallee scrub and heath of the park is typical of the coastal vegetation in this region.

At Eucla, many people have their photo taken with the **international sign** pinpointing

distances to many parts of the world; it's near the playground's ferroconcrete sperm whale, a species seldom seen in these parts. Another popular photo stop is at the **Travellers Cross**, atop the escarpment which overlooks the ruins of old Eucla, and the **Eyre Memorial** stone.

Eucla is the border township. **Eucla Motor Hotel** (☎ 9039 3468; unpowered/powered sites \$6/18, budget s/d \$30/50, s/d with bathroom \$82/98; 🚽 🚿) is a great spot, with good facilities, wonderful views to the ocean and a great beer garden full of hardy flowers. Eucla runs on Central Western time – 45 minutes ahead of Perth time, and 45 minutes behind Adelaide time.

**Border Village** (☎ 9039 3474; unpowered/powered sites \$12/18, budget \$27, r \$89; 🚽 🚿 🚰) is 13km from Eucla and just across the SA border; you may need to stay here if Eucla is full. Remember to set your watch forward 1½ hours when you get to the border.

From Border Village, it's a spectacular 200km coastal drive to the **Nullarbor Roadhouse**, and about 300km further to **Ceduna**, passing the Yalata Aboriginal Reserve, Nundroo and Penong along the way.

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