

Iron Knob to Nullarbor – Nullarbor to Norseman – Norseman to Perth – Perth to Margaret River. The first leg of our road trip took us across the Nullarbor from Adelaide and inland towards Perth, before heading south to the Margaret River region. We had allowed two weeks for our trip and the second leg had us itching to explore WA's south coast. From Cape Leeuwin at the most southwesterly point of mainland Australia, then coastal town-hopping to Esperance, before turning homeward for South Australia.

 *Shelley Beach campground is 2WD accessible.*

Cape Leeuwin to Shelley Beach

Cape Leeuwin at the far southern end of Leeuwin-Naturaliste National Park is an excellent spot for a morning swim and fish. It turned out to be a popular digging spot for anglers looking for beach worms as bait too, as proven by the group of older folk we happened upon. The day's drive took us through the giant Karri forest around Pemberton and stopping for the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk. To experience the towering ancient Tingle trees from such an immersive, elevated vantage was excellent. The lady at the office suggested some good camping spots around the town of Denmark, including Cosy Corner and Shelley Beach.

 *On the edge of William Bay National Park, Greens Pool is known for its turquoise green water.* Driving between Denmark and Walpole, we made a quick visit to the popular Greens Pool and Elephant Rocks and managed to find a little piece of solitude between the crowds of social-media-ites. Accessed by a corrugated unsealed road with a steep section at the end, we pulled into Shelley Beach in West Cape Howe National Park for the night. Our campsite was populated by other quiet campers and fishermen, and we appreciated the warm cosiness of the campervan when the wind picked up during the night.

 *A morning fish caught plenty of seaweed and a few small Salmon Trout.*

Shelley Beach to Hopetoun

By the morning the wind and swell had calmed, and a couple of eager people were out swimming in the sparkling water at dawn. A morning walk up the beach with an 8ft rod and silver metal lure produced a few Salmon Trout, which were way too cute and had to be released. But there is some great fishing to be had along this stretch of WA's coast. Once packed up, we pulled into Albany a short drive away and restocked our food and water supplies at the local service station. Albany is a port city with a fascinating history pre-dating both Fremantle and Perth. The city is now a coastal hub but was once home to a whale processing plant – now a historic museum. During the cooler months, migrating whales can be spotted passing the rugged coastline and naturally sculpted granite outcrops at Torndirrup National Park. We were heading about 340km east, away from the Rainbow Coast to Hopetoun so needed to continue on.

We discovered Hopetoun to be a delightful town with a sleepy atmosphere, not at all busy despite our visit coinciding with a public holiday long weekend. We had some fun on the town bouncy pillow in McCulloch Park and then drove to Barrens Beach in the Fitzgerald River National Park.

Large rocks provided shelter for snorkelling in the bay and the mid-summer evening weather was perfect for a picnic of cheese and wine on the beach. Hopetoun has free 48-hour RV camping, so we drove the short 10km back into town to stay the night. First thing in the morning, we moved the van over to the Hopetoun Groyne and went snorkelling in the shark-netted beach area before moving on to our next destination.

Hopetoun was one of the highlights from our trip.

Hamersley Drive and Quagi Beach

Taking an impressive scenic route out of town, Hamersley Drive winds its way from Hopetoun through Fitzgerald River NP. The sealed road offers views of white beaches and the unique vegetation for which the park is known.

Hamersley Inlet looked a bit bleak under the day's weather, so we stopped at Mylies Beach for lunch and a swim instead.

Fitzgerald River National Park and Hopetoun ended up being one of the most enjoyable places we visited and next time we'd spend longer in this area rather than rushing on to other destinations.

Munglinup is a one hour drive west of Esperance.

Turning back on to the highway, we fuelled up at the Munglinup Roadhouse before checking out Stokes National Park on the way through to Quagi Beach. Stokes reminded me of the Coorong in South Australia and after doing a recce around the campground, we found the hosts were a little overzealous and decided to keep moving.

A corrugated dirt road took us into Quagi Beach camping area. This spot is counted among the seven beach camping spots around Esperance and boasts picturesque coastal surrounds and clean drop toilets. A wooden staircase down the dunes to the beach was a beautiful spot to watch the sunset. The camping area was quiet and populated mostly by families with caravans who were camping for the long weekend.

With white sand and turquoise water, Lucky Bay is an idyllic coastal escape.

Quagi Beach to 90 Mile Straight

A long day was ahead with 750km of driving, so we left early from Quagi Beach and drove to Ten Mile Lagoon near Esperance. The tide was heading out, so the *peaceful* Lagoon had turned into a raging torrent - no good for swimming! We cooked breakfast in the carpark while enjoying the spectacular views over the ocean, before continuing to Cape Le Grand National Park and Lucky Bay.

Renowned for its white sand and turquoise waters, Lucky Bay is a visitor's delight. Whether you lounge with the kangaroos on the beach or partake in your chosen water activity, this beach is another of Esperance's coastal camps and an absolute must for your itinerary. We jumped in for a quick snorkel and would have liked to stay longer, but commitments back home had us regretfully on the road and hot-footing it towards the '90 Mile Straight'.

With our phones charged, the road trip playlist was put into action and the van feasted on the km's as we travelled the A1. A storm was brewing in the distance and about halfway along

the 'Straight', we pulled into a roadside rest area for the night as the first drops of rain started.



A storm was brewing as we headed home along the 90 Mile Straight.

90 Mile Straight to Streaky Bay and Pt Augusta

We were in the final days of our road trip and rather than rush home and push the drive, our intention was to take it easy. The rain from the night before had set in but we decided to break up the drive by visiting Newman Rocks, a large rocky outcrop just outside of Balladonia in Ngadju country, and the lookout at Madura - the only vantage point across the Nullarbor where you can take in the sweeping views of 'nothingness'.

By the time we were pulling into Streaky, however, it had developed into a full-on storm. We visited an excellent Op-shop, had lunch at Bay Funktion Café, and walked along the jetty in the rain. Then it was back on the road toward Pt Augusta.

We camped in the same rest stop as the first night, just outside Pt Augusta and only a four-hour drive from Streaky. It was a nice finish to the trip, and we reflected on how it felt like ages (not 13 days!) since we had stayed there on the outbound journey.



Our rental campervan made the trip easy and simple.

Planning & trip preparation

"During Summer?" was the most common response we received when sharing our plans with friends and family. Perhaps they had forgotten that vehicle reliability and air conditioning has advanced significantly since the 80s. Mobile coverage was limited for some of the Nullarbor and at the time of writing, Telstra was the most reliable network for getting a signal. There were always trucks passing though, and we had plenty of water in case we got into trouble and had to wait for help. For more remote travel that takes you off the beaten track, carrying a PLB offers reassurance.

Our campervan was equipped with an in-built 40L tank, plus we carried an additional 40L of water in jerry cans. A short length of garden hose and a funnel were handy and let us fill the internal tank from the jerry to keep the water pump/kitchen tap running in the van.

In planning this trip, we decided on our mutual points of interest, plus national parks and other attractions we were keen to experience. Once those had been plotted on our map, we then moved on to camping grounds or free rest areas to stay nearby. Our trip coincided with the January long weekend and the end-of-school-year holidays, which restricted availability but we got lucky and space was found at all of the places we had bookmarked.

Being a La Niña summer, we experienced mild temperatures most of the time. Kalgoorlie's 40°C however, pushed us into purchasing a 12V fan which provided some relief when sleeping in the un-airconditioned back. The van's fridge kept our food and drinks cool, even though we only stayed in a powered campsite once during the whole trip. We suspect this was due to doing a lot of driving, and consequently the battery had time to recharge. We also had a routine of turning the fridge down to the lowest (warmest) setting whenever the engine was off. This reduced the risk of sending the 'house' battery flat overnight, and in the

morning the fridge was cranked up again once the engine was running.



The Valley of the Giant Treetop Walk is well worth a visit.

Our rented 2WD campervan had a distance limit of 12km when taking the vehicle off sealed roads. We spent a fair bit of time estimating which campsites and attractions were within reach, using Google Maps and Streetview, but it turned out that most of where we wanted to go and what we wanted to see were usually on sealed roads anyway. If you were wanting to head further off the beaten track and explore some more isolated areas, then a 4WD would allow greater accessibility.

The whole trip from Adelaide to Perth via Kalgoorlie and returning to SA along the southern coast of WA took 13 days. This packed in several national parks, a day trip to Rottnest Island, the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk, plenty of swimming, scenic lunch stops - and all while maintaining our commitment to indulging in an evening wine and cheese platter.

We enjoyed the simplicity of the campervan and being able to rock up at a campsite and have somewhere warm and secure already set up to cook and sleep. Sharing the journey with our merry crew of three was an awesome experience and one we would recommend to anyone seeking a wholesome Aussie adventure.

Have you ever driven across the Nullarbor?