

A Self-Guided Walk

February – March 2025

WITTUNGA



This walk is more or less in two parts, with a bit of a trek between, but there are several shelters along the way for a rest in a bit of shade. The red numbers on a white background on the map over page refer to additional sites or comparisons relevant to the text for that number.

See over page for map

*An Australian native

- 1 *Salvia muirii*** Muir's sage, African blue sage Cape Province South Africa
A hardy, long-lived, drought-resistant and generally pest-free shrub which resprouts after fire from rhizomes below ground. It flowers all summer and also spot flowers most of the year. The crushed leaves are said to smell like Vicks. Another specimen is growing next to the African lily at the next site.
- 2 *Agapanthus africanus*** African lily, bloulelie South Africa
This African lily from the winter rainfall areas of the fynbos, known there by its Afrikaans name, has deep-blue flowers and narrower, more upright foliage than the more common light-blue species (*A. praecox*). In its natural habitat on rocky sandstone slopes of the SW Cape coastal mountains, it flowers from November to April, particularly after fire. Pollination is by wind, bees and sunbirds, and seeds are dispersed by wind.
- *3 *Eucalyptus forrestiana*** Fuchsia gum WA
This young fuchsia gum is a highly ornamental small eucalypt (to 4 m tall) from the Esperance region of Western Australia. One of four related species with very characteristic red, four-winged buds and fruits, the bud caps are pushed off by the emerging yellow stamens, which in this case are relatively short. It can be multi-stemmed, but unlike mallee eucalypts, fuchsia gum lacks a lignotuber and so cannot resprout after fire. One of its relatives, *Eucalyptus stoatei* with very similar buds and flowers can be found at **3a**.
- *4 *Eucalyptus lane-poolei*** Salmon white gum South-west WA
About 30 paces up an incline is a eucalypt which grows as a tree or mallee depending on its environment, both forms with a large lignotuber allowing regeneration after fire. When growing as a tree, it is noted for its twisted, spreading branches, and often a tangled and irregular appearance with age. Our spectacular tree could be cut back to the lignotuber to promote bushy growth, but only at the expense of its charm. It is named for Charles Edward Lane-Poole (1885–1970) a pioneer of Australian forestry.
- *5 *Eucalyptus macrandra* (unlabelled)** Long-flowered marlock Western Australia
Off the SW corner of The Billabong, between stands of SA blue gum and silky oaks, is a sprawling mallee with attractive peeling bark, large clusters of long straight slender buds and spectacular "balls" of up to 31 lemon-yellow flowers. Both the Latin and common name refer to the long stamens. If flowering finishes early in this exposed site, you may have more luck with a labelled specimen flowering in a more sheltered position at **5a**, in this case a small single-stemmed tree form arising from a lignotuber.
- *6 *Melaleuca cuticularis*** Saltwater paperbark SA (Kangaroo Is.), WA
Saltwater paperbark is common in saline swamps and estuaries in coastal areas of southwest WA. Unlike many melaleucas with bottlebrush 'flowers' and closely-packed woody fruits along the stems, *M. cuticularis* has more or less solitary fruits, which develop from flowers in groups of three at the ends of the branchlets. The pale, papery bark and star-shaped (seen end on) woody capsules are good field characters for this species, best seen in the one set back from the path or, if you're energetic, the compact tree at **6a**. For comparison, look for the arrangement of fruits on the *Melaleuca* and related *Callistemon* at the next site
- 7 *Sutherlandia frutescens* (now *Lessertia frutescens*)** Bladder senna, cancer bush Southern Africa
About halfway along the path indicated by the arrow is a cool, shady canopy of willow myrtle, *Callistemon* 'Harkness' (Gawler hybrid bottlebrush) and *Melaleuca bracteata*. Around the margins of the combined canopy are many spindly bladder sennas, fast-growing, short-lived members of the pea family with bitter-tasting, silvery pinnate leaves. In its native environment the flowers are pollinated by sunbirds and the seeds develop inside papery inflated legumes easily dispersed by wind. Although not the oft-claimed miracle cure for cancer, the plant has long been used for medicinal purposes in southern Africa. On your way back to the carpark from site 9, look for *Nymanea capensis* at **7a**, an unrelated species laden with papery, inflated capsules which are often blown under other bushes ('nurse plants') where young seedlings are protected.
- 8 *Agave victoriae-reginae*** Royal agave Northern Mexico.
Royal agave is a small succulent flowering perennial, with small, compact basal rosettes, found in parts of the Chihuahuan Desert. The short, rigid, thick green leaves often have distinctive white markings along leaf keels or margins. Cream-coloured flowers are borne on an erect scape up to 4m long. When grown as an ornamental it is best planted in a very porous, sandy soil in direct sunlight or bright shade and allowed to dry out between waterings. Propagation is normally by seed as, at least in cultivation, it rarely produces pups.
- 9 *Dasyilirion* sp.** Sotol Mainly Mexico, some also native in south-west USA
Dasyilirion is a genus of 23 species of rosette-forming plants native to mountainous, arid regions of Mexico. The name sotol is used for various species of *Dasyilirion*, as well as a distilled spirit made from some of those species. Along with the agaves, it now belongs to a sub-family of the Asparagaceae. Small male and female flowers are on separate plants and borne on tall central flowering stems. Unlike most of the related agaves, they do not die after flowering and may flower many times. *Dasyilirion* was once a major food source in the drier regions of southwest USA and Mexico. The leaves were, and sometimes still are, used in thatching, basket making, and weaving into hats or mats.