

FOSSIL

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This book was grown and written on
unceded Whadjuk Noongar land, with
visits to Yuat and Binjareb country.

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When you think about it, the fossil record is like a series of photographs: frozen moments from what is really a moving, ongoing reality. Looking at the fossil record is like thumbing through a family photo album. You know that the album isn't complete. You know life happens in between, you only have the pictures. So you study them, and study them. And pretty soon, you begin to think of the album not as a series of moments, but as reality itself.

FOSSIL

visited fossil sites

Mammoth Cave
The Coal Seam
La Brea Tar Pits
Broome
Kalbarri gorges and cliffs
Shark Bay stromatolites
Lake Thetis, Lake Walyalup, Lake Richmond,
Lake Clifton and Yalgorup Lakes
Devonian Reef
Coal Mine Beach
Cape Range National Park
Kennedy Range National Park
The Burgess Shales
Jurassic Coast
Gingin

unvisited fossil sites

Gogo Formation
Cuddie Springs
Ediacara Hills
Riversleigh
Naracoorte Caves
North Pole, Western Australia
Willandra Lakes Region (Lake Mungo)
Liang Bua Cave
Fossil Grove
Gotland
Messel Pit Fossil Site
Moyjil

Crabs and fish
ahead 300m

Sorry
We're closed

Thrombolites

Perth to Lake Clifton and return 211 km

It starts with petrichor

overpowering the car's air vents as I drive down from Perth to Mandurah and a little further south to Lake Clifton. It's bunuru, or late summer and an atypical, blustery day. Cold air has come up from the south and there is a slick of water on the road. Light rain overnight has mobilised a summer's worth of oil and hydrocarbons on the tarmac. But that's not what I am smelling.

Road weather alert

Secret Harbour

Golden Bay

San Remo

Lakelands

Meadow Springs

Silver Sands

Miami

WTF! Florida Waters

Estuary Hideaway Holiday Park

What was once a sleepy holiday town between the Indian Ocean and the Peel-Harvey Estuary has long been transformed into the streets and houses of greater Mandurah. The Castle Fun Park has been burnt, graffitied and now cleared for housing. Ospreys in suburbia; kangaroos are caught behind high fences. If you were to soar overhead, what passes for aspirational living would be black roofs, no gardens and no fucking trees!

If Perth lives on the banks of an old woman, the Peel-Harvey Estuary is an intestinal double-structure: half stomach, half large intestine. After passing over the Dawesville Cut, the Old Coast Road snuggles down along the colon of Harvey Estuary.

Here the petrichor is at its strongest. It is the overpowering scent of Peppermint Tree and Eucalyptus combined. It reaches deeper, too, with layers of humus and hidden fungal life. The wet leaves and soil release an essence that reads of the coast of Western Australia: of Tuart forest and coastal thickets over limestone terrain. Further south, and within my living memory, the Old Coast Road was once a thin journey beneath a cathedral of tall Tuarts. But turning off the road we leave the Estuary to go over the Mandurah-Eaton Ridge on the steep Mount John Road.

Which was sliced through limestone and sandy dunes out to the Indian Ocean in 1994 to relieve symptoms of estuary eutrophication

I stop the car to take some notes on what I have been seeing. There is a scraggy *Jacksonia* here. It is a disturbance species commonly seen on the roadside. A Red-capped Robin drops to the road in front of my car before flashing off into the trees. Suddenly birds are flitting around. They have changed and we are somewhere else than suburbia. There are small brown things I can't tell what and a Jacky Winter perched on the *Jacksonia* checking out the 'hood with its head jerking back and forth. And another bird with head like a fantail but not a fantail. There is sand mining hidden behind the trees nearby, but still the forest survives. Each leaf on the ground has micro puddles of water stained with tannin. The smell is strong.

We are near the place where I once came to Lake Clifton early in the morning to do a dawn chorus sound recording and a whole field of beef cattle was out on the road. A gate had been left open somewhere and their bodies were smudges in the dark.

There is a kind of rhythm to the Swan Coastal Plain – of parallel geomorphic units that face the coast. To travel east to west is to cross over younger and younger landscapes. Driving over the Mandurah-Eaton Ridge we move closer to the sea through bush blocks and rural subdivisions. During the Pleistocene a sequence of calcareous sands were deposited and

the beach moved westward. Vic Semeniuk calls this plain Youdaland. Over time it was exposed to the air, weathered and further transformed through karst and calcrete development. Lake Clifton formed some time later behind a quartz sand spit – the Myalup Sand Barrier – that grew along the coast through longshore drift, forming a lagoon and then a lake. According to fossil shell evidence, Lake Clifton closed to the sea for the last time sometime around 4670 to 3890 years ago.

The sky is bluing up and the moisture knows it.

Exhaustion and loss

Fire Fighting Bore

Midgies

You have arrived at the Lake Clifton Thrombolites.

or at least, the carpark.

Do not leave cash or valuables in your car



OUR BUNBURY LETTER.

Perhaps in no other case has so much sympathy been elicited throughout this district as has been given to the survivors of the sad boat accident on Lake Clifton, which occurred last week, and certainly there has been no parallel case here of such boating sufferings as the survivors experienced. The news of the deaths by drowning of the two girls, who are well known here, was a great shock, but when subsequent intelligence revealed the full details of the accident and the sufferings of the survivors quite a gloom appeared to settle over the community. The Herron family previous to the accident consisted of four sisters and a brother. The family, for years, has resided on Lake Clifton where they have been fairly successful, as graziers. On Tuesday of last week three sisters and the brother, the fourth sister at the time being in Bunbury, went up the lake in a dingy to see some cattle and it was when returning home that the accident happened. Chase had been given to a swan that was unable to fly, a strong S.W. breeze blowing, and the bird was rapidly approached, but when a short distance ahead it passed to leeward of the boat. Young Herron who was steering turned the boat rapidly after the bird with the result that the sail came over, and the occupants, of the boat then being to leeward the boat capsized. The two oldest sisters who were sitting near the mast, got entangled in the sail and were nearly exhausted when they came to the surface. The four then struggled to cling to the boat, which was unable to sustain their weight, and in a few minutes the two oldest sisters sank. The boat capsized in about 10 feet of water, and the end of the mast shortly after the two were drowned, got fast to the bottom. In the struggling both the brother and sister had divested themselves of their clothing, but neither of them could swim. The brother placed his sister as far as possible on the boat out of the water, and in this position they remained from Tuesday to Thursday evening when the stays of the mast broke and the boat drifted ashore. Their sufferings during this time were terrible, and were enhanced by the fact of their being constantly



Back view of the derelict Mt John Homestead on the Old Coast Road to Bunbury with a note that after the ~~Battle~~ of Pinjarra in 1836 the Aborigines retreated around the back of Mt John to Lake Clifton.

Massacre