

Gorge Loop Road

Sturt National Park



Gorge Loop Road passes through extensive Mitchell Grass and Gibber Plains on the way to Mt. Wood Gorge and Summit. It begins at the historical Mt. Wood Homestead Complex, which provides an excellent display of regional pastoral history. The 100km round trip from Tibooburra, via the Wanaaring Highway and the Silver City Highway, takes 2-3 hours. An extra 2 hours if you decide to do the Mt. Wood Summit Walk.

1 OUTDOOR PASTORAL MUSEUM

The Gorge Loop road starts here at the turn off from the Wanaaring Rd. Take the first right to Stop 1; the Outdoor Pastoral Heritage Museum, which provides an excellent display of regional pastoral history. Here you will see a reconstructed horse-drawn Whim that was used to raise well-water: also, the remains of a wool scour. For further information see the *Mt. Wood Homestead Complex* brochure. To visit the wool shed take the turn-off just before Thompson's Ck. Walk across the suspension bridge to look at the shearers' quarters. The original was burnt by shearers in 1928 because they didn't comply to standards. These are now used for self-contained bunk-house accommodation.

2 MOUNT WOOD HOMESTEAD COMPLEX

Mt. Wood Homestead Complex on your left. A Camp-Ground is on the right opposite the Homestead. The homestead dates back to 1886. Since then it has evolved, like many out-back homesteads, from a stone hut into a rambling multiple-dwelling complex. Mt Wood was a major sheep station lease comprising 500,000 acres. After the lease expired in 1972, it was acquired by National Parks and Wildlife as part of Sturt National Park. Stop here at the carpark and take a stroll around the homestead via the walking track. The Homestead itself is an award-winning tourist accommodation destination. The *Mt. Wood Homestead Complex* brochure provides more detailed information.

3 REDS, GREYS AND EMUS

Here on the open stony plains you may see

kangaroos and emus. Throughout Sturt National Park there are four different kangaroo species: Red Kangaroos, Western- and Eastern-Grey Kangaroos and Euros. Not all Red Kangaroos are red. The adult males are usually red, but the females ('blue flyers') and their young are often a blue-grey colour. All have white on their faces. The numbers of kangaroos in the park fluctuate with the seasons. Breeding may stop altogether during drought because there is insufficient food and water. Emus are also quite common throughout the park. These large birds cannot fly. However, they can run at 48km/hour. Adult females lay up to 20 eggs in a nest on the ground and the adult males incubate and protect the eggs and raise the chicks.

4 GIBBER PLAINS

The surrounding stony rolling plains are typical of the eastern section of the park. They are called Gibber plains or Mitchell Grass plains. Gibber refers to the weather-worn silcrete and quartz pebbles that have been eroded from the steep sides of the hills, in this case, the Mt. Wood Range. The open plains support low vegetation cover of Copperburr, Saltbush and Mitchell grass. You may be lucky enough to see the tiny Inland Dotterel or the ground-running Pratincole on the plains. Both birds lay their eggs on the hard stony ground, where they rest camouflaged amongst the Gibber stones. The rare Australian bustard may be active after rain in grassy places.

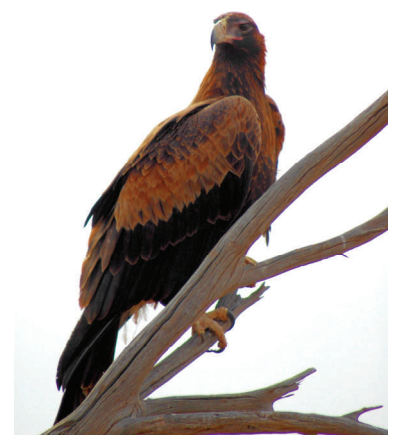
5 EUROS AND GIDGEE

As the plains give way to small rocky gorges that flank dry creek beds, you may catch sight of stocky, dark-grey Euro kangaroos sheltering during the heat of the day beneath rock overhangs and Gidgee trees. Euros also have rounder ears and shaggier coats than other 'roos. They emerge on dusk to graze on grasses and shrubs. The trees lining the small rocky gorge to your left are Gidgee (*Acacia cambadgei*). They have narrow pseudo-leaves

(phyllodes) to reduce water loss. Chemicals in the leaves create a pungent, offensive odour during humid or wet weather.

6 GORGE LOOKOUT

The Gorge Lookout overhangs Twelve-Mile Creek (the Park's major watercourse). This creek system drains the eastern part of the park. It starts near Mt. Sturt, winding and descending gradually across the plains, to empty into the Bullagree Swamp on the edge of the Bulloo Overflow. Aboriginal people quarried the rocky outcrops in the gorge for many generations. The high-quality stone was used to make tools such as long-knives, scrapers, spear points, adzes and choppers. Sometimes tools or raw stone were traded far afield. Eucalypt and Acacia wood was used to make weapons such as spears, clubs, boomerangs and shields. Also from this lookout you may catch sight of some more of Sturt National Park's bird species. The iconic Wedge-Tailed Eagle is one of the largest birds of prey in Australia. They use rising hot air to soar and glide majestically over the plains in search of food, such as small kangaroos, snakes, lizards, birds, rabbits, foxes, feral cats and carrion (dead animals). Adult Wedge-Tailed Eagles may pair for life and often build several nests in their territory. Each nest consists of a large platform of sticks in the fork of a tree. The older adults are almost black in colour with a wingspan of up to 2.5m. Young birds are lighter in colour.



Wedge-tailed Eagle Photo: K. Plidington

7 BORES AND THE ARTESIAN BASIN

South Torrens Bore is just on the edge of the Great Artesian Basin. When first sunk it was a true free flowing artesian bore and 10,000 gallons per day flowed from the porous sandstone bed beneath. This lasted for 10 years until combined tapping of over 20,000 bores across the Basin led to depletion of the water level. Water was then pumped up by windmill from a depth of 15metres. The bore is no longer in operation.

8 MOUNT WOOD SUMMIT WALK

Turn off here to do the Mt. Wood Summit walk – 1km off the main road. The isolated rocky peak stands 120m above the surrounding plains and its pointy cap makes it an easily recognisable landmark. Charles Sturt, the explorer, named it in 1845 during his epic journey in search of the mythical “Great Inland Sea”. Your efforts to reach the summit will be rewarded with stunning views of the surrounding Gibber plains and gorge country. The walk is about 4km long and lasts 1-2 hours. Please take care on the rocky path and remember to carry water, wear a hat, suitable footwear and sunscreen.

9 HORTON PARK RUINS

Originally a station in its own right, Horton Park became an outstation of Mt. Wood pastoral lease in 1949



after its own lease expired. Horton Pk originally covered an area of 25,680 acres and is located on the flood plain of Twelve-Mile Ck. As you turn off from Gorge Loop Rd, the remains of the shearing shed are on your right. This was built of hand-hewn timber posts (Gidgee) and was originally roofed with cane grass. Yards to the south once held around 4,000 sheep, ready to be shorn. Just over the creek are the remains of the homestead and outbuildings.



Australian Bustard
Photo: K Piddington

10 DRY CREEK BEDS

One of the noticeable features of the creeks within Sturt National Park is that you rarely see them flow. The creeks are ephemeral (temporary) and the channels can hold large amounts of almost instantaneous flows when it does rain. The creeks are typically lined with a variety of eucalypt species including River Red Gum, Coolabah and Black Box. Wet or dry, the creek lines shelter a wonderful variety of birds. Take time out to wander along the creek bed, look for birds and enjoy the peaceful surrounds. If you have a keen eye and some patience you may see Eagles, Falcons, Parrots, Honeyeaters, Woodswallows and Budgerigars and other, more rare species.

11 1974 FLOOD LEVEL

Try to imagine this vast landscape covered in muddy water – that’s the way it was in 1974 after extended intense rain. 30 inches, 762mm fell that year (the average maximum for the area is 200mm). All roads were cut and supplies came in by air.

STAYING SAFE IN PARKS

Many NSW Parks are remote and rugged places, weather can change quickly and conditions in the bush can be unpredictable. Please ensure you and your vehicle are prepared for your journey. Carry extra food and water. Wear appropriate clothing and footwear and a hat. If you become lost or stranded always stay with your vehicle. Tread lightly on the environment and it will always be here for you to visit again.

CONTACT NPWS

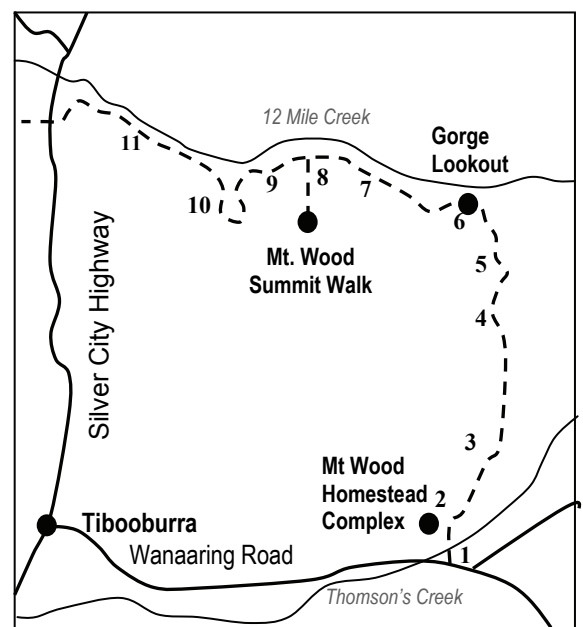
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*Map not to scale