

Vegetation varies across the Pilliga according to changes in soil texture and moisture, fire history and human activity. Most of the area is a complex mosaic of eucalypt and cypress pine forests and more open woodlands, with a shifting parade of undergrowth and dominant tree species.

Wildlife

Birds are the most obvious inhabitants of the Pilliga. The mix of birds from both eastern and western climates attracts birdwatchers from all over.

In Australia some woodland birds, mammal and reptile species are struggling to survive. Some local birds that find refuge in the Pilliga include glossy black-cockatoos, barking owls, red-capped robins, brown treecreepers, regent honeyeaters and grey-crowned babblers.

Mammals include Pilliga mouse, eastern grey kangaroos, red kangaroos, red-necked wallabies and koalas. Reptiles include a variety of snakes and lizards, which are more likely to be seen in the warmer months. Frogs such as the crucifix frog and water-holding frog, remain buried underground during drought and only appear after rain.

Fire

Bush fires are a regular feature of the Pilliga story. Large wildfires, mostly started by dry thunderstorms, run through the eastern parts of the forest every 10 years or so. The plants and animals of the eastern Pilliga forest have adapted and been shaped by regular fire. The western Pilliga forest burns much less frequently, and you may notice the vegetation is quite different here. NPWS and Forests NSW staff conduct prescribed burns for hazard reduction and ecological management.

Geology and Landscape

The Pilliga Sandstone is the foundation of everything that has happened in the Pilliga forest. Vast horizontal layers of sediment were laid down in a series of lakes during the Jurassic period, some 150 million years ago. The sand was compressed and cemented into rock which was later shattered by the volcanic eruptions that threw up the Warrumbungle and Nandewar Ranges. The Pilliga features low ranges that rise up to around 600 metres altitude in the east then fall gently to wide sandy plains in the west.

Nature of the Pilliga

Western Way (photo: J. Whittall/ OEH)



Many people first notice the Pilliga as that hundred kilometres of highway between Coonabarabran and Narrabri - a long, straight road cutting through a vast expanse of rolling bushland.

The Pilliga is full of life and richness. The forest changes from cypress pine to ironbark to scribbly gum to box and back again in just a few hundred metres. Expansive heathlands burst into spring colour, massive river red gums line the sandy creeks and more than 350 species of birds, mammals, reptiles and frogs make the forest their home.

This is one of the iconic landscapes of the Australian inland. With low rocky hills and less fertile soils than the surrounding farmlands, the Pilliga has survived as the largest forest in New South Wales west of the Great Divide (500,000ha of public bushland).

The Pilliga's long journey through human history stretches from Aboriginal life to timber-getting, mining, grazing and other uses.

Today, more than half of the forest is protected in conservation reserves managed by the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). Much of the rest is managed by Forestry Corporation NSW for timber production and other values. The best thing about the Pilliga is that everyone can enjoy it. Hundreds of kilometres of roads and management trails make for easy access, so it's the perfect place to explore the great Australian bush.

About the Pilliga

Cultural heritage

The local Gamilaroi (also written as Gamilaraay or Gomeroi) Aboriginal people are proud of their cultural heritage. This heritage includes a connection to the Pilliga landscape and the native plants and animals within it. Stone tools, grinding grooves, modified trees and rock art provide a strong link with traditional times.

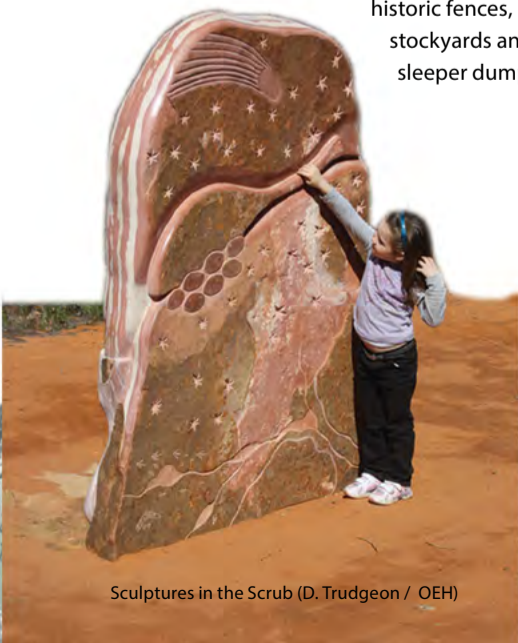
The first Europeans to see the Pilliga were John Oxley's exploring party in 1818. Settlers soon followed, moving west in search of grazing land for sheep and cattle.

Farming faced many problems and timber-cutting gradually came to the fore and grew into a major local industry. By 1908 there were 300 men cutting sleepers on Crown Land south of the Pilliga-Narrabri road.

Sleeper cutting eventually ceased by the year 2000 with the introduction of concrete and steel sleepers. The number of cypress pine sawmills in the area also fell, so that by 2010 there were just two mills taking timber from the Pilliga.

Evidence of the fascinating history of the Pilliga can be found in many places, including its road network, fire towers that are still in use, grave sites, old sawmill sites,

tanks, bores, house sites, historic fences, stockyards and sleeper dumps.



Sculptures in the Scrub (D. Trudgeon / OEH)

Look after the Pilliga Forest

- Leave your pets at home if visiting National Parks and Wildlife Service reserves.
- All plants, animals, rock formations, Aboriginal sites and historic relics are protected in all National Parks and Wildlife Service reserves.
- Firearms and other hunting equipment are prohibited in all National Parks and Wildlife Service reserves.
- Take your rubbish out with you when you leave or use bins if provided.
- Water is scarce in the Pilliga Forest so please do not use soap or detergents in or near water bodies.
- Access to Pilliga Nature Reserve is restricted to Sandstone Caves and the No 1 Break Rd.

Look after yourself

- **Obtain a copy of the detailed Pilliga Forest Map before you leave the main roads.**
- Carry plenty of water and food and stay with your vehicle in the event of a breakdown. Notify someone of your plans.
- Roads can become impassable after rain so it is best to check road conditions before setting out.
- Watch out for kangaroos, emus and other animals, particularly at dusk and dawn.
- Reduce your speed for the conditions.
- Beware of sand, loose gravel, potholes, creek crossings, washouts and dust.
- Be prepared for off track walking by carrying a map, navigational aid, water and food supplies and let someone know of your planned walk.
- Mobile phone reception is unreliable. In an emergency dial 000 or 112 on a mobile phone with limited service.

For further Information

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service:
 Pilliga Forest Discovery Centre. (02) 6843 4011
 Baradine Area Office. ph (02) 6843 4000
www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au

The NPWS is part of the Office of Environment and Heritage

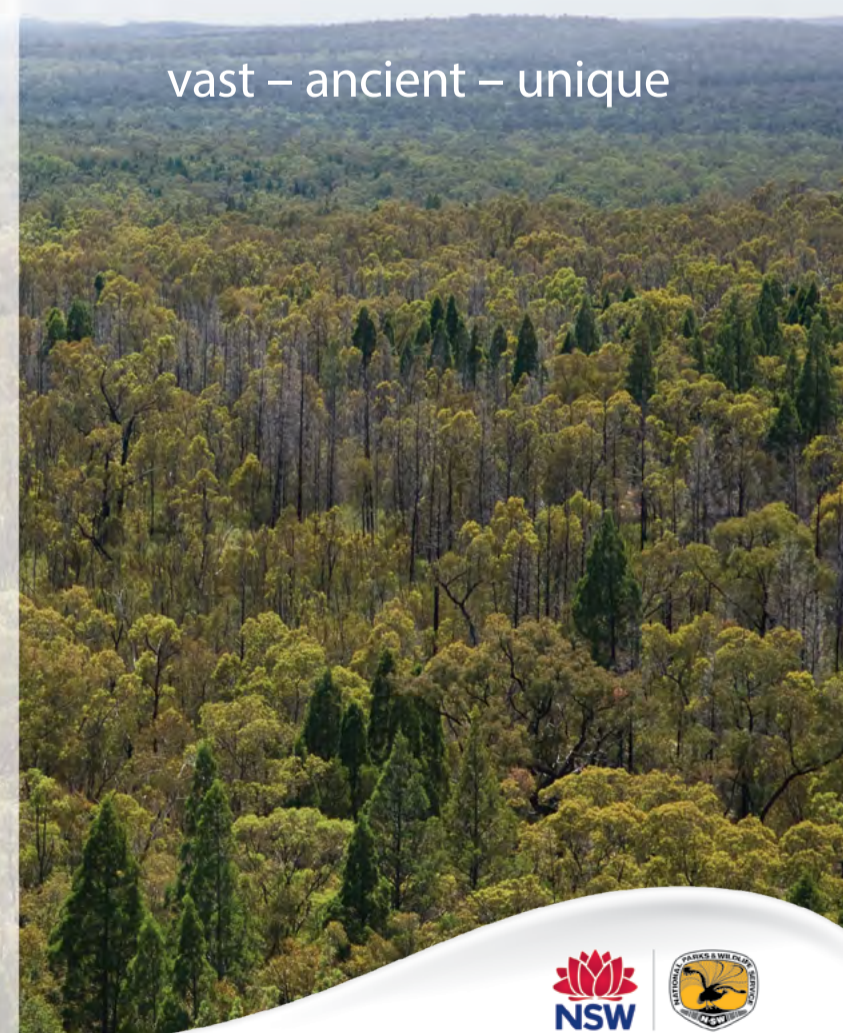
DECCW 2010/1026 Cover photo: Ian Brown/ OEH

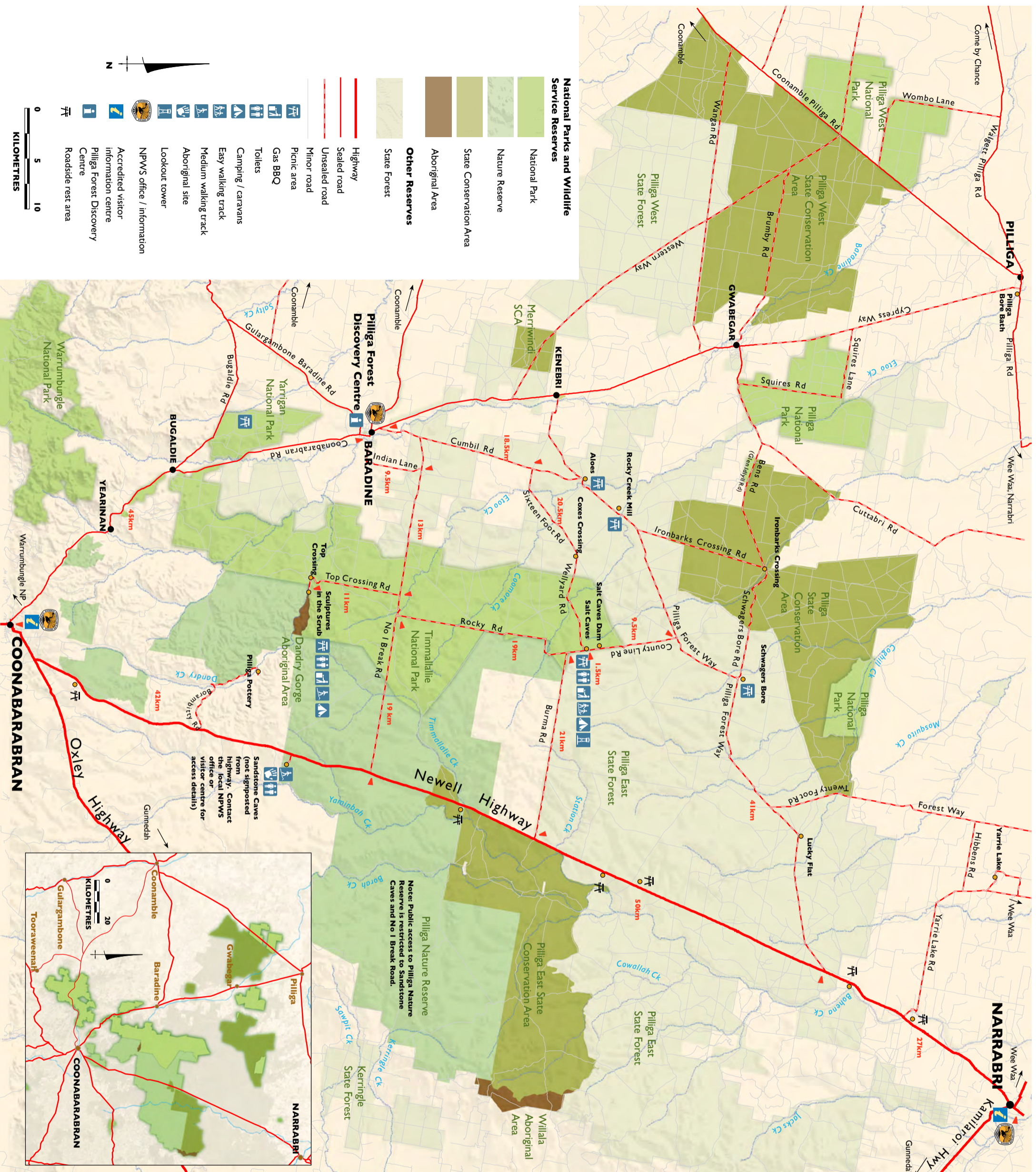
Visitor Guide

Pilliga forest

National Parks & other reserves

vast – ancient – unique





Pilliga Forest Discovery Centre:
OPEN 7 days – 9.00am–4pm. Admission Free.
Wellington St Baradine

Discover the hidden secrets of the Pilliga forest and the stories of yesteryear with this fun and entertaining exhibition. This architecturally designed environmentally sustainable centre will captivate visitors of all ages. Featuring the latest in interactive displays and technology your 'walk in the forest' will reveal fauna, flora and cultural heritage – the Pilliga like you've never seen before.

National park reserve highlights

The Pilliga forest offers many unsealed scenic forest drives and bird routes to observe the wildlife including some of the 230 species of birds found in the area. Picnic facilities are available at Sculptures in the Scrub and at Salt Caves. Sculptures in the Scrub. The Sandstone Caves and Salt Caves have short marked walks and off track walking is allowed in all National Parks and State Conservation Areas unless signs indicate otherwise. Tent, caravan and motorhome camping is recommended at the formal camping areas at Sculptures in the Scrub and The Salt Caves.

Sculptures in the Scrub, Dandry Gorge – Timmallalie National Park

The Pilliga forest's latest attraction includes magnificent Aboriginal culture inspired sculptures overlooking the spectacular Dandry Gorge. A medium grade walk of 1.2km will take you past all five sculptures and offers spectacular views of the gorge. You can either return the way you came or continue along the loop track, which takes you down into the scenic gorge along Dandry Creek. The total distance of the loop track is 3km. Dandy Gorge is a very special place for the Gamilaroi people, the sculptures are not out of place with their natural surroundings rich in Aboriginal history.

Sandstone Caves: Pilliga Nature Reserve

Directions to access the Sandstone Caves are required as the area is not signposted from the Newell Highway at the request of Aboriginal Elders). The Sandstone Caves are a special place for the Gamilaroi people and is a good place to experience Aboriginal Culture in the Pilliga forest.

The 1.7km medium grade walk takes you through a picturesque part of the forest to the impressive sandstone hills. The numerous caves along the walk range in sizes and colour with some containing Aboriginal rock engravings.

The best way to experience the Sandstone Caves is on an Aboriginal Discovery Ranger guided tour which can be arranged by contacting the Pilliga Forest Discovery Centre (minimum numbers and fees apply).

Salt Caves and Pilliga Forest Tower:

Timmallalie National Park

The Salt Caves visitor area and Lookout Tower are in the central part of the forest and has a picnic and camping area, which include picnic tables with shelter, free gas barbecue and toilet facilities. The cave itself is much smaller than the Sandstone Caves but is a good place to temporarily escape from the heat of summer. An easy 1km stroll takes you to a dam which when full of water attracts many species of wildlife and is a great spot for bird enthusiasts.

Bird Routes

The Pilliga is well known for its Bird Routes – a series of mapped and signposted routes ideal for bird enthusiasts to view the impressive array of birds found over a variety of local habitats. Please ensure you obtain the informative and detailed Bird Routes brochure available at local visitor information centres or NPWS offices, before travelling these routes.