

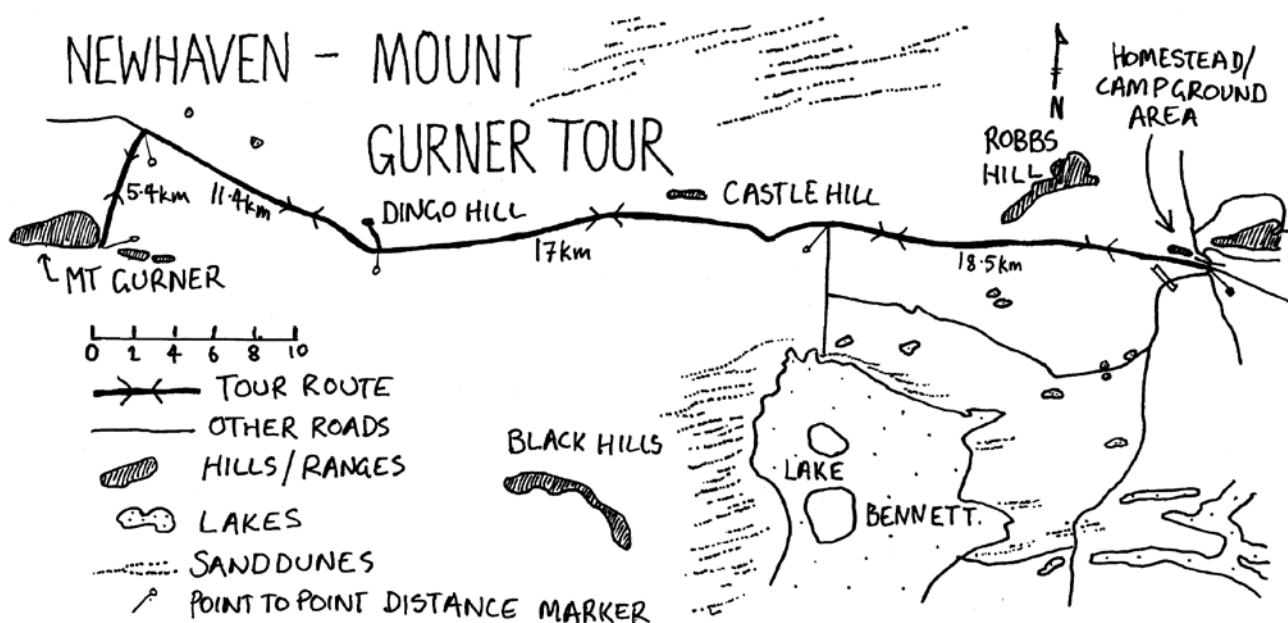
# Newhaven Wildlife Sanctuary

## Dingo Hill & Mount Gurner Tour

**Please Note:** Newhaven Sanctuary has a vast number of tracks and firebreaks. Not all of these are open to the public. For safety please keep to designated tracks. Always carry plenty of drinking water. Whilst on Newhaven please use UHF channel 3 Duplex.

### Dingo Hill & Mount Gurner Tour Summary

Dingo Hill and Mount Gurner are towards the western end of the Sanctuary. The return trip is about 100km. The tour includes a short walk up Dingo Hill and an optional strenuous (but not hazardous) climb up Mount Gurner, one of the higher rocky hills on Newhaven. Both climbs offer spectacular views to the west. Allow at least 4-5 hours.



### Tour Notes

#### 0.0km - Bird Box:

This Tour begins at, and is distance-referenced from, the Registration/Information Shelter ('Bird Box'). Start from here after noting the odometer or resetting the trip meter. Travel south out to the main road, then head west (turn right) on the main road.

Robbs Hill will appear on your right hand side. You will travel along its southern edge for a number of kilometres. From when you pass the last visible tip of Robbs Hill, you enter an expanse of bloodwood sandplain. To the south-west are the Andrew Young Hills. These hills have been given an appropriate local nickname, The Black Hills, as they often sit in shadow.

Bloodwood are an important tree in Central Australia for many reasons. On Newhaven they are the main hollow bearing tree. Mature tree hollows provide crucial habitat and breeding sites for a range of species including the Black headed monitor (*Varanus tristis*) and Pygmy mulga monitor (*Varanus gilleni*), the Barn and Southern Boobook owl, Budgerigar and Cockatiels. As a food source, medicinally and for the creation of tools the bloodwood was and is still extensively used by Aboriginal people.

Although Bloodwoods can re-sprout after mild fires, they are killed by hot fires or by successive fires within the trunks. After frequent fires Bloodwood communities seem to be replaced by Ghost Gums.

### **18.5 km - Mount Gurner Homestead Bore:**

The Mount Gurner buildings have long gone and the bore is now defunct. The only remains of this cattle station, that amalgamated with Newhaven in 1982, are some tumbled down yards, a cattle crush, and an area of Buffel grass and other weed species. You are asked not to enter the weedy areas.



As you come abreast to a low hill on the right, Castle Hill, you can see that its geological structure is the same as the other hills on Newhaven with a resistant capping layer made of quartzite. Castle Hill appears subdued, as though it is slowly sinking into, or being buried by the sand sea.

Just beyond Castle Hill the landscape opens out. Blue mallee sand plain and expansive open saltbush flats are the two dominant vegetation types.

Open saltbush flats are concentrated in the western half of the Sanctuary occupying approximately 5.6% of the total area of Newhaven. Because of their shallow soils they rarely support plants higher than half a meter. None the less, this vegetation community supports three rare plant species including *Bergia occultipetala*, *Eragrostis crateriformis* and a *Fimbristylis* species. Scattered throughout this community there are small islands of different soils, which support stands of mulga over short grasses.

The Orange Chat is considered an indicator species of particular fire regimes for this vegetation unit. If the vegetation within this community is mature, that is, has experienced infrequent fires, then the Orange Chat should be present.

It is also thought that the Night Parrot may feed on fire sensitive chenopod species within this habitat.

### **35.5km - Dingo Hill Turn Off:**

A small quartzite outcrop, named Dingo Hill is on the right hand side. Follow the wheel tracks up till you reach the old bore head on the left hand side. Park here. This track unfortunately follows a drainage line and in the summers of 2006/07 and 2007/08 was severely eroded.

Follow the remaining track on foot and climb to the small hilltop; a cairn marks the highest point. To the south are the Black Hills with Mt Liebig visible in the background. To the north are the Truer Ranges running out to the west. To the west are Mt Gurner and the Campbell Range. These mountains form a beautiful cluster of hills. To the north of these hills lies Nyirripi Community.

Dingo Hill supports a remnant population of acacia. Most of this community has been killed by fire. The northern slope of Dingo Hill provides a fire shadow (a natural boundary that protects vegetation from fire eg. bare rocky ground), which supports a number of other fire sensitive species including native plum (*Santalum lanceolatum*), Black Gidgee (*Acacia pruinocarpa*) and native currant (*Canthium latifolium*).

Head back to the main road and turn right to head towards Mount Gurner or left to return to Newhaven Homestead. The track winds back towards Dingo Hill and crosses its western most edge. It then meanders through a few rare patches of diverse and long unburnt mulga woodlands before opening out again onto open saltbush flats. Here you will be able to see Mount Gurner to your left.

### **46.9 km - Mt Gurner Turn Off:**

When you are just beyond the eastern tip of Mount Gurner there will be a turnoff on the left hand side. Take this turn.

Along the track you will drive through small patches of what is commonly known as the upside down plant, (*Leptosema chambersii*). This plant is a small (40cm) spiny intricately branched rounded shrub. Its large red flowers, which contain a very sweet nectar, have adapted for bird pollination, and grow under the plant at ground level. Even if this plant is not in flower you may be able to notice this unusual characteristic by looking for old flowers.

### **51.8 km**

The narrow track leads towards the eastern edge of Mount Gurner. The foot of the northern face is littered with large boulders that have fallen from the bluff over many years. To the left is a small set of associated quartzite hills.



### 52.3 - Mount Gurner Climb

Here the track continues along the southern face of Mount Gurner, however, please stop here. The track ahead has been closed for regeneration.

From here you may choose to climb Mt Gurner; a cairn is visible on a small rocky outcrop at the top.

Mount Gurner being 710 m above sea level is about 150m above the surrounding plain. It is more than 3km long and runs in an east - west direction, with steep slopes on either side.

The rocks of the Newhaven hills began to form over a thousand million years ago. Layers of very fine sand were deposited in a shallow ocean. The sand, reddish in colour, was weathered from an eroding lifeless land surface. Its colour came from particles of iron rusted by the oxygen that was now free in the ocean and the atmosphere (generated by photosynthetic water-dwelling bacteria). The sand covered a layer of water-smoothed pebbles and cemented them together. These two layers were in turn covered by more and more sediment washing into this shallow sea from the bare, unprotected land surface. Over almost a billion years, the fine sand and pebble layers were squeezed flat by sediments above them. Under that enormous pressure, the temperature of the rock rose high enough to fuse the individual sand grains together. The layers metamorphosed into quartzite and conglomerate.



The land surfaces beside the shallow ocean were the three earliest land surfaces of what is now Australia. Its neighbours were the bits of the Earth's crust now called Tibet, India, Africa, Madagascar, and South America. Next, Antarctica crashed into and fused with Australia, forming a partnership that would last almost 900 million years.

The three core bits (cratons) of the present Australian continent were jostled together with unimaginable tectonic force. At the join of these three cratons the layers of pink quartzite and conglomerate were buckled and twisted like the pages of a crushed book, in a gigantic but slow moving upheaval and formed metamorphic rock. These dramatic changes took place in what is now central Australia. They were completed by about 350 million years

ago. The result was the formation of mountain chains that were thrust to roughly the same height as the Himalayas. Since then, these huge mountains have been progressively eroded away until they are less than 10% of their original size. Though just the stubs of what they once were, the central Australian ranges remain impressive and beautiful today.

**60.2 km - Main Road:**

Return to the main road along the same route used on the outward journey. Turn right at the main road, which will take you back to Newhaven Homestead.

*We hope that you have enjoyed this tour.*