



The West Australian travel

thursday

Rest and be thankful

The water at Mary Pool 24-hour stop on Great Northern Highway, between Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing. The big waterhole is alive with fish. Pictures: Stephen Scourfield

STEPHEN SCOURFIELD
thinks 24-hour stopping
areas are a great idea



In the old days of driving around the Kimberley, before we all arrived in numbers, it seemed that almost every place where the road crossed a river or creek, there was a bit of a track leading to an unofficial overnight camp spot.

Times changed and, one way and another, the spots seemed to vanish.

But under the WA Caravan and Camping Action Plan, they are making a return. One of the action plan's recommendations is for new 24-hour rest areas in the North West, along with specifics such as the installation of more dump points for the safe disposal of black waste by

travellers in self-contained recreational vehicles along key roads.

While the 24-hour stops may be aimed primarily at combating fatigue, what they have done, I feel, is give us back that old feeling of just wandering around the

Kimberley, and not merely just transiting from town to town.

I am driving south on Great Northern Highway from Kununurra to Warmun, Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Broome.

And, 45km from the junction of this highway with the Victoria Highway, which leads into Kununurra and on towards the Northern Territory, is the Dunham River 24-hour stop, with the Saw Ranges behind, just north of Doon Doon Roadhouse and on the shoulder of this important Kimberley river.

There are two sizes of barbecues (travellers need to bring in wood or fuel) — big ones by camping spots and small ones by the parking area.

There are toilets, including one for disabled folk. Tables and benches are under roofs and there are nooks and crannies to push into, though it is sure to be busy at the height of season.

Further south, there's Muluk's Rest near Fletcher's Creek and then the Leicester's Rest 24-hour stop.

Further south again is Mary Pool — a big 24-hour stop area, again with toilets, an RV dump spot, bins and barbecues. Mary Pool is a big waterhole alive with fish and the camping area is under big, shady trees.

And then on south to the 24-hour stop at Ngumpan Cliff, east of Fitzroy Crossing.

Once again, there are toilets and a dump spot, tables and benches under shady roofs — and all set on a dramatic conglomerate rock breakaway.

Even when I get 110km from Broome, there's the Nillibubbica 24-hour stop.

I know that some folk in Kimberley



tourism question the free stops and I have heard plenty of anecdotes about travellers digging in and staying a week for free. But what I like is the feeling of being welcome.

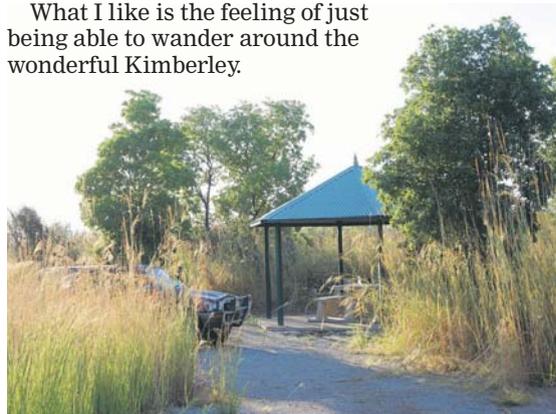
I think travellers are going to still settle in the good caravan parks with their facilities but they might slow the days down and stop for a night here and there at a 24-hour spot.

And a free night helps to bring down the cost of the whole trip — extra cash that might be spent on a tour or a dinner out.

What I like is the feeling of just being able to wander around the wonderful Kimberley.



What I like is the feeling of just being able to wander around the wonderful Kimberley.



A convenient shelter at the 24-hour stop at Dunham River on Great Northern Highway.



WORKS EDITION

GANNAWARRA News

Sandstone Crushing

160,000 tonne of sandstone is currently being crushed at Denyers Pit, West of Kerang.

The sandstone will be used as road pavement material throughout the Gannawarra Shire.

Gannawarra Shire Council has this financial year resheeted approximately 50 kilometres of gravel road with a combination of sandstone and crushed rock through the annual resheeting program. Council is responsible for the maintenance of 1,750 kilometres of unsealed roads throughout the Shire.

We wish to remind drivers that throughout the winter months, unsealed roads can become slippery and drivers are urged to drive to the conditions.

Anyone wishing to provide feedback on Council's road network is encouraged to contact our Customer Service Team.

'Poly Com' Trial Wandella Road

A product to stabilise road material is currently being trialled on Wandella Road, from the Kerang Quambatook Road to the Wandella Recreation Reserve.

The product, 'Poly Com', binds particles together to assist with drainage and eliminate corrugation.

Testing of the road will commence in four to six weeks.

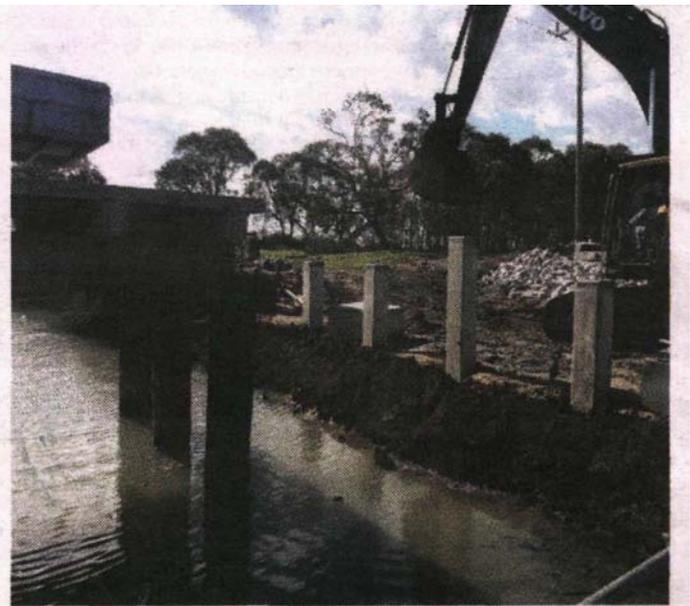
Old Echuca Road Bridge Works

Works to replace two bridges with one on Old Echuca Road (pictured below) are progressing, with the removal of the old bridges expected this week.

The replacement bridge, over the Nine Mile Creek, will be a 7.5 metre wide three-span concrete bridge, specifically designed for higher mass capability.

An area under the bridge is to be expanded to allow for the removal of the west bridge and a branch crossing to revert to roadway.

The construction is expected to take up to six weeks and has been funded by the State Government's Country Roads and Bridges Program.



Dump Points

Gannawarra Shire Council is currently installing two Dump-Ezy units in Kerang and Cohuna.

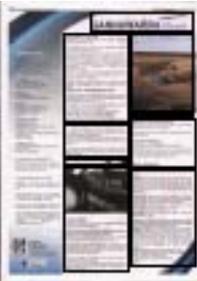
The units allow travellers with motor homes and caravans to dispose of their septic waste quickly and easily.

The units are connected directly into the sewer, providing sanitary and environmentally friendly waste disposal.

The Campervan and Motorhome Club of Australia have provided the units free of charge and Council is currently preparing the necessary infrastructure to install the units in line with standards and regulations.

Work is continuing on both sites and the units are expected to be ready for use by mid-June.

A dump point at the Leitchville Recreation Reserve has also been installed, which was an initiative of the Leitchville Progress Association.



Netball Court Resurfacing

Netball court resurfacing at the Macorna and Murrabit Recreation Reserves is now complete.

Both netball clubs were successful in receiving State funding for the projects.

Tate Drive Sealing

The sealing of Tate Drive Stage 8 is now underway.

The \$409,000 project will see up to 14 new industrial sites to be made available for development. Further information on the development is available by T. 5450 9333.

Works Round Up

The below works are expected to commence in the coming weeks, however please note works may be subject to change.

Grading: Bornemans Road, Hildebrands Road, Semples Road, Randalls Road, Cohuna Mincha West Road, Barr Road, Harrowers Road, Packenans Road, Loop Road, Nicol Road, Parker Road, Olsen Road, River Road, Hannah Lane, Punt Road, Crump Road, Nolan Road, Hold Road, Weir Road and Ritchie Road.

Sealed Roads: Road edges to be patched on Macorna Pyramid Road, Kerang Macorna Road, Murphys Lake Road, Cohuna Island Road and Quambatook Swan Hill Road.

Gravel Roads: Works continue on the Benjeroop Tresco Road with sealing to commence from 19 May.

Resheeting: Holt Road – 1.2km, Nolan Road – 800m and Ritchie Road – 1.2km

Footpaths: 50 metres of footpath to be replaced in various areas of Cohuna whilst the construction of the new walking track on Island Road is to commence shortly..

Drainage: Replacement of 100 metres of kerb and channel in Shadforth Street Kerang is underway with the new kerb expected to be poured this week. Staff have put in culverts on the Benjeroop Tresco Road and Coopers Road areas. Inspection and maintenance of storm water systems in Kerang, Cohuna, Quambatook and Lalbert will also commence.

Bridges: Bridges on Mystic Park East Road and Lake Charm East Road will receive works to the approaches whilst inspections will take place on Condidorios, Barr Creek and Loddon River Bridges.



Sandstone crushing is currently taking place at Denyers Pit.



The caravan park operator, the donation to an embattled MP, and the law change

» **EXCLUSIVE KIRSTY NEEDHAM** STATE POLITICAL EDITOR

Controversial Liberal MP Chris Hartcher has been drawn into another donations scandal, with revelations a holiday park developer benefited from legal changes made by the government after donating to Mr Hartcher's election campaign.

Norton Whitmont hosted a fundraiser in his Darling Point home for Mr Hartcher and donated to Mr Hartcher's 2011 election campaign. He stands to gain from a law change introduced last year covering mobile home villages, which critics say gives landowners the upper hand in raising rents.

The change was strongly opposed by pensioner groups.

However, it was backed by Mr Whitmont and his son Theo, who run the Camping and Caravan Industry Association, and own the Kincumber Nautical Village, Gold Coast Holiday Park and a \$4 million site at Avoca they plan to develop.

Norton Whitmont was named in the Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry as a donor to the Liberal's 2011 Terrigal campaign by Mr Hartcher's former employee Ray Carter.

Mr Whitmont had been lobbying for changes to a 1998 residential park law since it was introduced by the Carr Labor government. Labor's law protected tens of thousands of park residents, mostly pensioners, from sharp increases in rents, through a consumer tribunal.

Parliamentary records show Mr Whitmont sat in the public gallery on November 12, 1998, as the lower house debated Labor's law and Mr Hartcher spoke against the bill.

Labor accused Mr Hartcher of mirroring the position of Mr Whitmont's association, and benefiting from donations. The donations accusation was challenged and withdrawn.

"The CCIA is calling the tune of the opposition and has the ... honourable member for Gosford [Mr Hartcher] dangling on a string," said then Labor member for Wyong Paul Crittenden.

Elderly residents in Mr Whitmont's caravan park had signed a petition in 1998 welcoming Labor's law, and last year petitioned against the Coalition government's changes.

After the O'Farrell government was elected, Fair Trading Minister

Anthony Roberts, who is a member of Mr Hartcher's right faction, began a review of the law, saying it was a key election promise.

But the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association (CPSA)

has cried foul over irregularities in the review process that they say not only ignored the views of most park residents but also resulted in the abolition of the government-funded advocacy group Parks and Village Service (PAVS), a fierce critic. None of the 2200 submissions made to Mr Roberts' office about the law has been released publicly, except under freedom of information.

Labor, Greens and independent MPs said residents flooded them with complaints about the new bill.

But Chris Spence, the Liberal member for The Entrance, spoke in support of the bill in Parliament. Mr Spence said there were seven parks

in his electorate, and 12 in Wyong. Mr Spence and Liberal Wyong MP Darren Webber are under investigation by ICAC for their part in Mr Hartcher's alleged scheme of laundering political donations for favours.

Theo Whitmont heavily influenced the new law, and is quoted in all press releases about it from Mr Roberts' office. Mr Whitmont's submission, released under freedom of information law, criticised the tribunal reviewing rent increases, and called for park owners to be allowed to share in the sale price of a resident's home.

Many park residents pay upward of \$200,000 for their homes, usually their main asset, and they strongly opposed this.

But Mr Whitmont's submission claimed the industry group had col-

laborated with the Affiliated Residential Parks Residents Association to "negotiate elements" of the draft bill.

ARPRA, which was granted \$100,000 by Mr Roberts, says in its submission the draft bill had caused "widespread distress" by removing protections for residents, but then goes on to say that such protections are only valid in welfare legislation and not fair trading law.

Theo Whitmont said neither he nor his father had asked Mr Hartcher to review the law.

Mr Roberts' spokesman said he had not discussed the review with Mr Hartcher. "The residential parks reform arose from a Coalition election commitment to review the existing act, a decision made prior to March 2011 and therefore prior to Minister Roberts taking on the portfolio," said Mr Roberts' spokesman.

CPSA senior adviser Charmaine Crowe said: "CPSA is heartened by the current ICAC inquiries, which suggest that property developers would go to any length to get their way."



‘The CCIA has the ... honourable member for Gosford [Mr Hartcher] dangling on a string.’ Former MP Paul Crittenden



Sought changes to mobile home park laws: Liberal Chris Hartcher (left), and holiday park operator Norton Whitmont, who was named as a donor to the MP's 2011 Terrigal election campaign.



RV market worth attracting



From its first-class eateries to its incredible ability to stage first-class events, Shepparton has a lot to offer tourists.

Sadly, however, we're often overlooked as a tourist destination.

It is for this reason we need to be forward thinking and innovative in how we attract tourist dollars.

In light of this, Greater Shepparton City Council's proposal to trial a voucher system to allow recreational vehicle travellers to access dump points at local car-

van parks is worth investigating.

For years now the "grey nomad" section of the tourist market has been growing, with more and more older Australians able to retire early and take advantage of superannuation.

It is an older section of the market which is less likely to skimp on costs.

These are people we want to attract to our region.

RV tourists are also well organised — putting out publications which include, among other things, where

tree dumps are available.

It is something which stands to give Shepparton a competitive edge.

Cr Dennis Patterson raises a fair point when he questions the value of transient tourists to the region.

While the scheme may attract them here, how beneficial will it be if they don't stop and take in the town?

Because of this, council's decision to trial the scheme for a year to test its impact on the local industry — both in terms of attracting visitors and the economic benefits for Shepparton — is prudent.

In 12 months' time we'll

have a better idea about the benefits of the scheme.

The \$25 vouchers will only be redeemable at Greater Shepparton caravan parks, meaning no loss for our region's tourism operators.

It would only take a couple travelling in an RV to stop for a meal after they dumped to recoup the cost of the voucher.

It is difficult at this stage to predict whether the scheme will be a success.

Too often we're a "drive through" destination for visitors heading to Cobram or Echuca.

Anything we can do to give people another reason to stop here and take in some of our fabulous attractions is well worth considering.