

FORESTS OF THE PILLIGA SCRUB

The "Pilliga Scrub", is vast unusual western woodland characterised by native white cypress and iron bark forests, broom bush plains, vivid spring flowers and abundant fauna. Pilliga (or Billarga) is an Aboriginal word meaning swamp oak. It was used back in the mid 1800's as the name of one of the original grazing runs, near where the town of Pilliga now stands.

Occupying about 500,000 hectares between the Namoi River in the North and Warrumbungle Ranges in the South, the Pilliga comprises the largest remaining area of native forest west of the Great Divide.



The current forest structure is a product of the history of settlement in the area. European settlers started arriving around the early 1830's. These settlers established grazing runs throughout the forests, which then comprised a few well-scattered large trees over a grassy understorey. Aboriginal burning and grazing by Kangaroo Rats had kept the forest floor clear of regeneration until that time.

The introduction of Cattle and Sheep resulted in significant ecological changes. The soils deteriorated and the mix (and grazing quality) of the native grasses changed. The Kangaroo rats were displaced. The 1870's and 1880's produced a prolonged drought that saw most of the grazing runs abandoned. Then, during the late 1880's and early 1890's, there was a succession of good seasons and, in the absence of grazing pressure and regular burning; massive regeneration of native cypress and eucalyptus took place across much of the Pilliga.

The spread of Rabbits to the area in the early 1900's prevented any further regeneration events in the Pilliga until the introduction of myxomatosis in the 1950's. With the demise of the Rabbit, a new pulse of young cypress and eucalypt seedlings was able to get up and away.

The success of the Cyprus regeneration, whilst welcome, represents a management challenge. Many hundreds of cypress seedlings can be present on each hectare, and competition between densely growing stands can result in 'lock ups"- where growth is nullified as all available light, moisture and nutrients are expended solely on survival.

To ensure forest growth and future sawlog supply, these stands must be thinned out, a job that is carried out manually, using Brush cutters.

The cypress regeneration from the late 1800's forms the basis of the timber industry which operated from the Pilliga until recently. The timber industry has been greatly scaled back since 2005 when much of the forest was "locked up" by the NSW government for environmental conservation. Prior to this the 1950's and subsequent growth was managed to provide a sustainable supply of timber to industry for generations to come. In 1999, there were over 150 jobs dependant on the timber resources of the Pilliga and the industry provides the backbone of many small communities on the fringe of the Pilliga.

Between the 1920's and mid 1990's, over 5 million railway sleepers were cut from ironbark grown in the Pilliga. Ironbark is still used to produce fence posts and drops for electric fencing systems, where the non-conductivity of its heartwood provides a unique advantage.

PILLIGA SCRUB DETAILS

Dry Weather Road only

Some tracks 4WD

Only amenities situated at Yarrie Lake

Advisable to take a map (available at the VIC or NPWS offices) when travelling through the Pilliga

The only fuel available on this tour is at Narrabri and Wee Waa so you should set out with a full tank.

Tourist Drive 2 from Narrabri:

Take the Yarrie Lake Road from Narrabri for 21 km turn left on to road with signpost Yarrie Lake 3 km to Yarrie Lake, 2 km further to Knellers road where you turn right. Follow for 5 km to Wee Waa road where you turn left this road changes its name to Twenty Foot Road about 13 km on turn on to Pilliga Forest Way 18 km to Schwagers Bore (no facilities). Follow Pilliga Forest Way for 18 km to The Aloes (picnic tables, lots of Koalas) Its 9 km to Kenebri from there.

From here you have a choice to return to Narrabri via Gwabegar, Pilliga and Cuttabri and Wee Waa. Or you might like to return to Narrabri via to Salt Caves directions (below).

If travelling to Coonabarabran follow the road from Kenebri to Baradine and then onto Coonabarabran

Tourist Drive 2 from Wee Waa:

If doing this tour from Wee Waa, take the Yarrie Lake Road from Wee Waa, over the Wee Waa Lagoon (21 km to Yarrie Lake), then follow as from Narrabri.

Salt Caves directions from Narrabri:

Either take Tourist Drive 2 to the Aloes then:

Back Track about 2 km on Pilliga Forest Drive until you come to The Aloes Road – travel about 6 km to Sixteen Foot Road where you turn right onto Wellyard Road (about 9 km).

Or you can take the Newell Highway to the Burma Road turn off (55 km) then take Burma Road for 21 km. Turn right onto Country Line Road – Salt Caves is 2 km along this road.

* Information should be used as a guide only. Information is subject to change without notice and is in no way binding. Responsibility is not taken for inaccuracies in this information. Please contact the Visitors Information Centre on (02) 6799 6760 to check any details.