

Sundown Nature Trail

The Sundown Nature Trail is situated in the rocky Sundown Hills on the northern edge of the Broken Hill Common. The hills are sparsely vegetated with tough, perennial plants adapted to the harsh, dry environment. In a good season following rain ephemeral grasses, wildflowers and other herbs also appear. In the carpark eucalypts have been introduced to provide shade for visitors.

For nearly 100 years the Common was heavily grazed by stock and rabbits and the amount and diversity of vegetation have been reduced as a consequence. In the early days too, many trees were harvested for firewood and fence-posts and for use in the mines. Today grazing and tree removal are no longer permitted. Rabbits are being controlled with the introduction of selective diseases whilst feral goats remain a pest in the region.

Euros, the stocky dark wallaby (*Macropus robustus*) and Red and Western Grey kangaroos (*Macropus rufus*; *M. fuliginosus*) may be seen especially in the gullies. Reptiles include skinks, shingle back lizards, bearded dragons, goannas and brown snakes. Wedge-tailed eagles circle the ridges and wrens and finches dart among the bushes whilst galahs, parrots and crows call overhead.

Rocks along the trail are metamorphic schists and pegmatite. The schists were originally sandstones and shales deposited about 1800 million years ago. They were laid down in a rift sea on top of the silver, lead and zinc-rich rocks which now form the Broken Hill orebody. The rocks have been deeply buried and completely folded and are now made up mainly of quartz, feldspar, mica and sillimanite. The pale coloured coarse-grained rock which cuts across the schist is pegmatite. The pegmatite intruded the schist as molten magma several hundred million years later and crystallized to form white translucent quartz, creamy opaque feldspar, flaky clear-brown muscovite (mica) and, in places, red garnet and beryl.

Stop	Features to Note
1	At the foot of the gully you will see a number of plants which occur all along the trail. Velvet potato-bush (<i>Solanum ellipticum</i>) is a low spreading bush with grey velvet leaves, prickly stems and purple flowers with yellow centres. Rock sida (<i>Sida petrophila</i>) is a twiggy shrub up to a metre high with small yellow flowers. Silver-tails (<i>Ptilotus obovatus</i>) is a low subshrub with grey hairy leaves and white fluffy flowers. Three-Winged Bluebush (<i>Maireana triptera</i>) is a blue green subshrub with rosy flowers that dry to black. Along the path taller shrubs of dead finish (<i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i>) and prickly wattle (<i>A. victoriae</i>) become more common. Lemon-scented grass (<i>Cymbopogon ambiguus</i>) forms dense tufts in the drainage line and has a pleasant fragrance when rubbed. Higher up the gully close to the track is the narrow-leaved fuchsia-bush (<i>Eremophila alternifolia</i>). To the right, on the hill side, is a tree with drooping foliage and distinctive white trunk – the weeping pittosporum (<i>Pittosporum angustifolium</i>). The fruit is an orange capsule and the inner sticky red seeds were pounded into flour by the aborigines. The plant was also used to make an infusion for the relief of pain. Another medium shrub seen here is the spiny fan-flower (<i>Scaevola spinescens</i>) characterised by small white fan-shaped flowers.
2	Dead finish (<i>Acacia tetragonophylla</i>) is a medium sized wattle with needle-like 'leaves' which grow close to the track. The taller wattle growing near the crest of the ridge is mulga (<i>Acacia aneura</i>). After rain numerous small euphorbias appear. The most prominent is desert spurge (<i>Euphorbia tannensis</i> subsp <i>eremophila</i>) a small upright plant with green rounded capsules. The euphorbias have a white milky sap which deters grazing animals. Amongst the rocks high up on the right-hand side are a number of densely branched curry (or cough) bushes (<i>Cassinia laevis</i>).
3	Mulga (<i>Acacia aneura</i>) was once common in the hills and at this stop we see some young examples. The wood is hard and was used by the aborigines for tools and weapons and seeds

	were ground to make flour. The wood was also used in the mines. They are slow growing and mature trees may be several hundred years old. From the top of the ridge Stephens Creek Reservoir is visible to the SE and to the north the Silverton wind towers appear on the horizon.
4	On the ridge top the shrub with finely serrated dark green ovate leaves is green fuchsia-bush (<i>Eremophila serrulata</i>) which has unusual green flowers. The bush with red capsules and narrow dark green lobed leaves is a native hopbush – <i>Dodonaea lobulata</i> .
5	Amongst the rocks you will see little rock ferns (mulga fern - <i>Cheilanthes sieberi</i> subsp <i>sieberi</i> and woolly cloak fern - <i>C. lasiophylla</i>). These dry up in drought times but are quick to rejuvenate after rain. Jockey's cap (<i>Prostanthera striatiflora</i>) is a medium shrub with bright green aromatic leaves that often flowers prolifically in spring. Below the marker, and crossing the track, is a 10-30cm wide dyke of cream coloured pegmatite cutting across the darker schists.
6	A common plant here is lobed-leaf hopbush (<i>Dodonaea lobulata</i>) distinguished by its small glossy lobed leaves. Five metres to the left of the track is a good exposure of white pegmatite. On the way to Stop 7 cassia shrubs (<i>Senna artemisioides</i> group) appear beside the track with leaves that are divided into leaflets. In Spring these bushes have masses of yellow flowers.
7	Ahead is an alluvium-filled valley showing the effects of gully erosion. The low vegetation is dominated by black bluebush (<i>Maireana pyramidata</i>) and copperburrs. Along the track are two small gullies where there are rock sida, dead finish and lemon-scented grass, thorny saltbush (<i>Rhagodia spinescens</i>) recognizable by its small mealy grey leaves. The aptly named fruit-salad plant (<i>Pterocaulon sphacelatum</i>) also grows along the small gullies - just rub the soft wrinkled leaves for a fruity aroma. The track turns south-west here.
8	In the valley black bluebush is the dominant low bushy shrub. A range of bluebush and saltbush species would have occurred in much denser stands prior to the heavy grazing which once occurred on the Common. Pegmatite forms the hill on the left.
9	Prominent on the rocky crest of the ridge are green fuchsia-bush, lobed-leaf hopbush, cassia and jockey's cap. An unusual shrubby spurge grows here with dense slender stems bearing narrow leaves and green capsules. You can see an interesting fold at the base of the rocks immediately to the left of the track at the crest of the ridge.
10	Over the ridge we get a glimpse of Broken Hill. In the valley straight ahead are pits in pegmatite. These were worked for small pockets of beryl. Here the track turns east.
11	Beside the marker, pearl bluebush (<i>Maireana sedifolia</i>) can be identified by its pale blue foliage and downy branches. In this section of the track pearl bluebush is interspersed with black bluebush.
12	Lookout: Use the direction finder in the brochure to identify the main sights. Rock isotome (<i>Isotoma petraea</i>) has glossy green leaves and delicate white flowers and grows in the rock faces here after rain. Between Stop 12 and 13 is a tall emubush with long drooping foliage (<i>Eremophila longifolia</i>) with a number of young ones emerging around it
13	From the ridge top you can see Stephens Creek Reservoir to the east, as well as Stephens Creek village with its pub, surrounding houses and Nine Mile Station to the northeast. In the early days, market gardens adjacent to the gum-lined creek supplied Broken Hill with fresh green vegetables. Amongst the rocks are several curry (cough) bushes (<i>Cassinia laevis</i>). These have creamy white flowers and smell like – you guessed it – curry! Nestled in the rock too is a large

	clump of caustic vine (<i>Cynanchum viminalis</i> subsp <i>australe</i>). It is also known as snake plant because of its plump, smooth leafless stems.
14	In the large rock face is an 'eye' of quartz. The quartz is in the core of a narrow seam of pegmatite. The translucent quartz is surrounded by creamy feldspar aggregates which have small red garnets embedded in them. The schists enclosing the pegmatite show remnant beds of metamorphosed sandstone (lighter laminated layers) and shale (darker, irregular rock with clots of mica). Similar rocks, with a calc-silicate ellipsoid, occur 20m further on. The tree beside the track with drooping foliage and a dark trunk is emubush. It has peach coloured tubular flowers and blackish-purple fruit.

Directions and General Information

The Sundown Nature Trail is situated 10km north of Broken Hill on the Silver City Highway. At the radio beacon at the racecourse on the edge of town follow the highway towards Tibooburra for 10km. The turnoff to the Sundown Nature Trail is signposted and is just before Lawrence Engineering's large shed. Follow the 2.2km graded track to a car park at the beginning of the trail.

Suggested Times

The walk is at its best in the hours immediately before sunset or just after sunrise. The trail is 2.8km long and takes approximately 1.5 hours to complete. The terrain is hilly and rocky and is suitable for people with moderate levels of fitness. The walk is suitable for children over 7 if accompanied by an adult.

Caution

Although close to town, it is still the outback. Do not attempt the walk during the middle of a hot day in summer. Take your own water and supplies. Wear strong shoes. Hiking poles are recommended.

It's your trail – take only photographs – leave only footprints

Please keep the trail clean and take any litter home

The trail was originally conceived and constructed as a voluntary project for the Broken Hill Centenary in 1983, by the Barrier Environment Group. The trail and information were refreshed in 2018 by volunteers from the Barrier Rangers, Barrier Field Naturalists' Club and NSW Roads and Maritime Services as a Foundation Broken Hill 25in25 liveability project with the assistance of the Broken Hill City Council.