



# HILL WALK

## Self-guided Trail



This hill is a very important cultural site for Arrernte people, and we ask that visitors keep to the path. There is a sign at the top of the hill that gives more information about the significance of this site. This self-guided walk will introduce you to a number of the native plants that grow on rocky hill habitat in the region. You will also encounter introduced Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) on this walk. At the Garden there has been an ongoing effort over many years to control Buffel Grass in planted areas, however we have yet to control it on the surrounding hill habitat. Many of the native plants on this walk are evolved to tolerate drought – some of the sub-shrubs, ferns and forbs do so by dying back and regenerating from rootstock or tubers once rain falls again (these plants are referred to as ‘resurrection plants’).

This walk takes about 40 minutes for the return journey, please make sure you take water with you, and have appropriate footwear for the rocky path.

### 1. Whitewood *Atalaya hemiglauca*

**Arrernte name:** Arlperre



A widespread tree across central and eastern inland regions, Whitewood grows to 7 m high and occurs on a wide variety of non-spinifex habitats. It produces creamy flowers in the warmer months, and winged ‘helicopter’ seeds. Aboriginal people harvest edible witchetty grubs from the roots, and the soft white timber is used to make ornaments. In cultivation this species is susceptible to frosts when young, and often produces root suckers.

### 2. Smoke Bush *Ptilotus obovatus*

**Arrernte name:** Awerreke-alyeye-alyeye



Smoke Bush or Silver Tails is widely distributed in a range of habitats across inland Australia. It grows into a low rounded shrub up to 60 cm high. It flowers prolifically after rains, and is very drought tolerant. Aboriginal people sometimes harvest an edible grub from the roots of these plants.

**3. Dead Finish *Acacia tetragonophylla* Arrernte name: Arlketyerre**



The drought-resistant nature of this spiky wattle is captured in its common name – Dead Finish: the last species to peg out in severe drought. Growing up to 3 m high, Dead Finish is found in a range of habitats across inland Australia. Very showy in flower, these dense shrubs create good habitat for nesting birds, and their seeds (though not prolific) are a favoured bushfood of Aboriginal people.

**4. Striped Mint-bush *Prostanthera striatiflora***

**Arrernte name: Arrwatnurkle**



Striped Mint-bush grows up to 2 m high on rocky hillslopes and along rocky creeklines in Central Australia and semi-arid parts of South Australia and New South Wales. Aboriginal people mix the leaves with fat or oils to make a rubbing medicine. This showy species is cultivated in gardens, and although it flowers prolifically, it is relatively short-lived. In drought times this shrub looks almost dead on these hillslopes, but generally revives well after rains

**5. Witchetty Bush *Acacia kempeana* Arrernte name: Atnyeme**



The common name refers to the Witchetty grubs (larvae of a moth) found in the roots of this wattle. These tasty grubs are a favoured food of Aboriginal people in Central Australia, and are also dug out by bilbies (a rare desert marsupial) in the Tanami and Great Sandy Deserts. Witchetty Bush grows in a wide range of habitats across Central Australia, and this species is both drought- and fire-tolerant.

**6. Silver Cassia *Senna artemisioides nothosubsp. artemisioides***

**Arrernte name: Apwene**



A very common and widespread plant across the drier parts of the rangelands, Silver Cassia grows to 2 m high in a wide range of habitats. Along this path you will see other Cassia species, and you may also notice the distinctive “prayer” shaped structure of dead Cassias. Buttercup yellow flowers appear in August. Aboriginal people harvest edible grubs from the roots, and the leaves are used to make a medicine.

## 7. Native Fuchsia *Eremophila latrobei*

**Arrernte name:** Atnyerlengge



A widespread and common species across inland Australia, Native Fuchsia grows to around 1.5 m high, in a range of mulga-dominated habitats or on rocky hillslopes. There are two leaf forms – one much greyer, but both produce nectar-rich crimson flowers after rain events. This species can die back in dry times and resprout from “dead” branches after good rains. The leaves are used medicinally by Aboriginal people.

## 8. Dense Cassia *Senna artemisioides nothosubsp. sturtii*



Dense Cassia is common and widespread across inland Australia where it grows in a range of habitats. It grows up to 2 m high, and produces masses of sweetly-scented yellow flowers in the cooler months. Like Silver Cassia, this species is somewhat short-lived, but is easy to propagate and keep in cultivation.

## 9. Silver Indigo *Indigofera leucotricha*



This attractive silver-grey shrub grows up to 1 m high on rocky country in the Alice Springs region, parts of northern South Australia and western Queensland. Purplish-pink pea flowers are produced in early summer, or after rainfall. This species is very drought tolerant, but is not common in cultivation, as it grows well only in very well-drained, acidic soils.

## 10. Long-leaved Corkwood *Hakea lorea subsp. lorea*



The thick, corky bark gives rise to the common name for this species, and helps protect this shrub from fires. Growing up to 7 m high, Long-leaved Corkwood occurs on rocky hills, spinifex sandplain and in woodland communities across a large part of inland Australia. Large nectar-rich, yellow-green flowers are produced in the cooler months and Aboriginal people harvest these for the honey.

## 11. Buffel Grass *Cenchrus ciliaris*



First arriving in Central Australia in the 1870s in packing for camel saddles, Buffel Grass has been widely sown since then to curb erosion during the severe drought of the 1960s, and as a pasture species for cattle. A number of big rainfall years (the last being in 2000-2001) have helped spread this grass into many areas around the region, and there are now serious environmental concerns about its ability to out-compete native plants and to carry very hot fires in successive years. Many people are trying to control Buffel Grass on their properties, and there has been recent research done in the region to find feasible ways of controlling its spread outside of pastoral areas.

## 12. Mountain Wanderrie *Eriachne mucronata*



A widespread perennial grass in Central Australia, Mountain Wanderrie grows mainly in rocky habitats. This species grows in tufts that can be up to 40 cm high and it is very drought tolerant. Euros (Hill Kangaroos) don't seem to graze this grass, even when few other plants are available.

## 13. Blunt-leaf Cassia *Senna artemisioides subsp. helmsii*



Common and widespread across inland Australia, this species grows up to 2 m high, and produces masses of yellow flowers in the cooler months. It has distinctive silver-grey leaflets that are notched at the tip. Blunt-leaf Cassia is very drought tolerant, and can re-shoot after mild fires.

## 14. Horse Mulla Mulla *Ptilotus schwartzii*



Horse Mulla Mulla is widespread, but not very common, across fairly large area of inland Australia. It grows up to 1 m high on rocky hill habitats, or on Spinifex-dominated plains. Mauve-pink flower spikes are produced after rains, and this species can die right back during drought times and regrow after rains.

## 15. Rock Fuchsia Bush *Eremophila freelingii*



**Arrernte name:** Arrethe

[Turn right at the top of the hill]

Growing up to 1.5 m high, Rock Fuchsia Bush is common on the ranges and hills around Alice Springs. Large lilac flowers are produced after rains, and in droughts this species sheds its lower leaves to conserve moisture. This is an important medicinal plant for Arrernte people who steep the leaves and either drink the liquid or use it for skin ailments or for headaches. A rubbing medicine is also made from the leaves to treat colds and flus.

Some of the other species you will see along the path are the native grasses: Kangaroo Grass (*Themeda triandra*); and Flat-awned Three-awn (*Aristida nitidula*), other *Ptilotus* species (*Ptilotus macrocephalus* and *Ptilotus polystachyus*), Native Fig (*Ficus brachypoda* – near the Coolibah Swamp lookout), Caustic Vine (*Sarcostemma viminale subsp. australe*), and after rains – the resurrection ferns *Cheilanthes sieberi* and *C. lasiophylla* and many ephemeral forb species.

We hope you enjoyed this walk!

**Photo credits:** The images used in this guide are from past and present OPBG staff members: Alex Nelson, Chris Benz, Jenny Purdie, Connie Spencer, and Frances Smith (dec.).