

John Forrest is without doubt one of WA's favourite sons. Not only was he a surveyor, but also an explorer, and he led three major expeditions into uncharted country. He also became the first Premier of WA, and upon moving to federal politics held various ministerial positions including acting Prime Minister. He was knighted in 1892 and in 1918 he was recommended for a barony, however he died from cancer on the sea voyage to England and was buried at Karrakatta.

In the FOOTSTEPS of

His most famous expedition was in 1874 from Geraldton to the Darwin-Adelaide telegraph line. He left Geraldton on 1st April 1874 with a party of six men (including his brother Alexander), 20 horses and eight months provisions. We take up his expedition north of Wiluna and follow it via various landmarks through to Alexander Spring.

Reaching the area of today's Canning Stock Route (CSR), Forrest discovered a large water hole on Kennedy Creek and named it Windich Spring after Tommy Windich, an Aboriginal guide. At Windich he blazed a white gum F41, being his 41st camp since leaving Geraldton. The tree still survives but the blaze has long been overgrown. Continuing northward he then discovered and named Pierre Spring (later CSR Well 6) after Tommy Pierre, another Aboriginal guide.



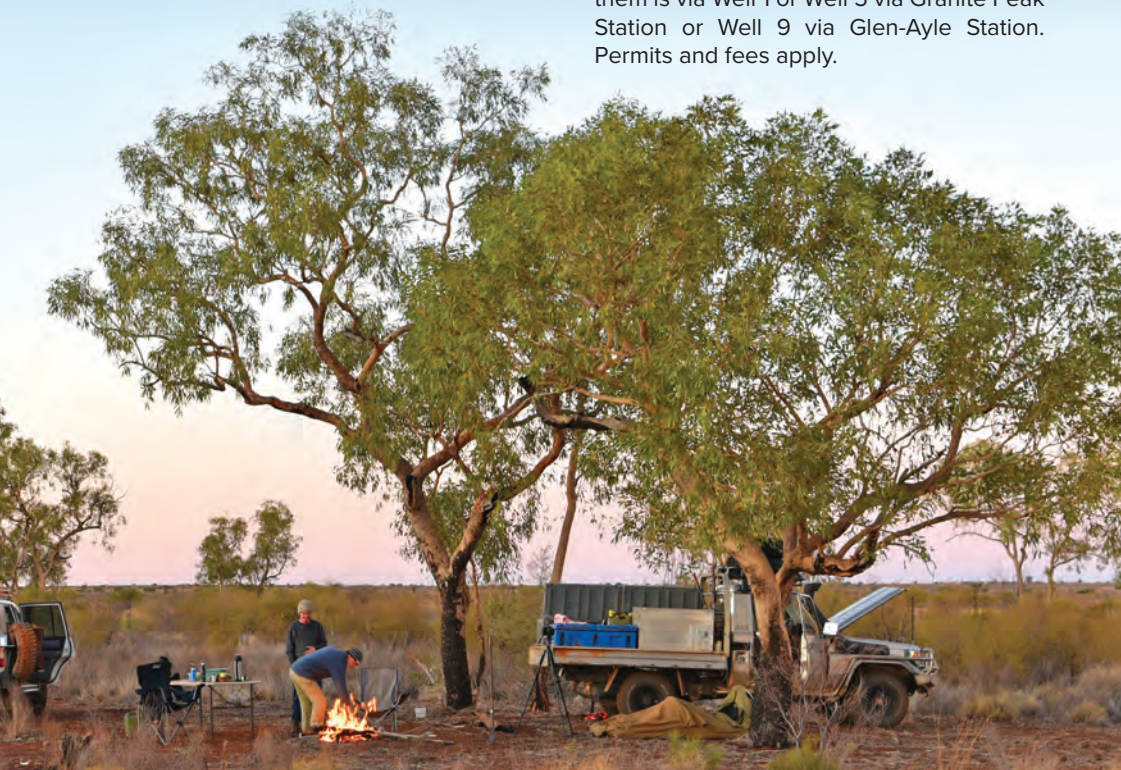
JOHN

Forrest again headed further northward, and on 2nd June he discovered “one of the best springs in the colony ... and is as clear and fresh as possible”, he named it Weld Spring after Governor Weld. Weld Spring would later become CSR Well 9. Here he blazed a corkwood tree F46, it has long since disappeared, presumably burnt by fire. Forrest’s party was resting here when on 13th June a party of some 40 to 60

Aborigines attacked. They were repelled by gunfire. Forrest’s party then built a stone fort thatched with tree branches to keep them safe from any night attack. The ruins of the fort are still visible today.

Forrest conducted several short expeditions using Weld Spring as his base camp.

Windich and Weld Springs are trackside on the CSR wheel track. Entry and exit to them is via Well 1 or Well 5 via Granite Peak Station or Well 9 via Glen-Ayle Station. Permits and fees apply.



FORREST

By Phil Bianchi



▲ **Forrest's fort at Well 9 on the CSR.**

Photo: G and D Sweetman

Leaving Weld Spring, Forrest's party headed south-easterly in search of water. They camped near Mt Moore, named by Forrest after Mr. W. D. Moore from Fremantle, a subscriber to the Expedition Fund.

Mt Moore, which provides extensive views from the south west to the south east, is located near the Carnegie Glenayle Road. It's a relatively easy climb to the top where there is a plaque commemorating the 1974 Forrest Centenary retracing expedition led

by Stan Gratte of Geraldton. While camping at the foot of Mt Moore, Forrest blazed a tree F50. Nowadays the tree is dead and the remains of the blaze is lying face down in the dirt. We identified the tree after finding a shiny metal sign attached to it which was placed there by Robin Sharp in 1987. The tree had fallen over since then. Using fencing wire, we relocated the sign so it can readily be seen by passers-by.

Our next quest was the blazed tree at Camp F51. We had prior approval to search for the tree which was deep within Carnegie Station country. After many fruitless hours of driving station tracks in search of the

▼ **Forrest's F50 blazed tree at Mt Moore.**



blaze, we made several satellite phone calls to Carnegie seeking more information and were then able to pinpoint the tree. The tree was still alive, but the blaze had been eaten out. Despite initially being unsuccessful in locating the blaze, the search took us through some spectacular country with ranges, mesas and a mosaic of trees and grasses.

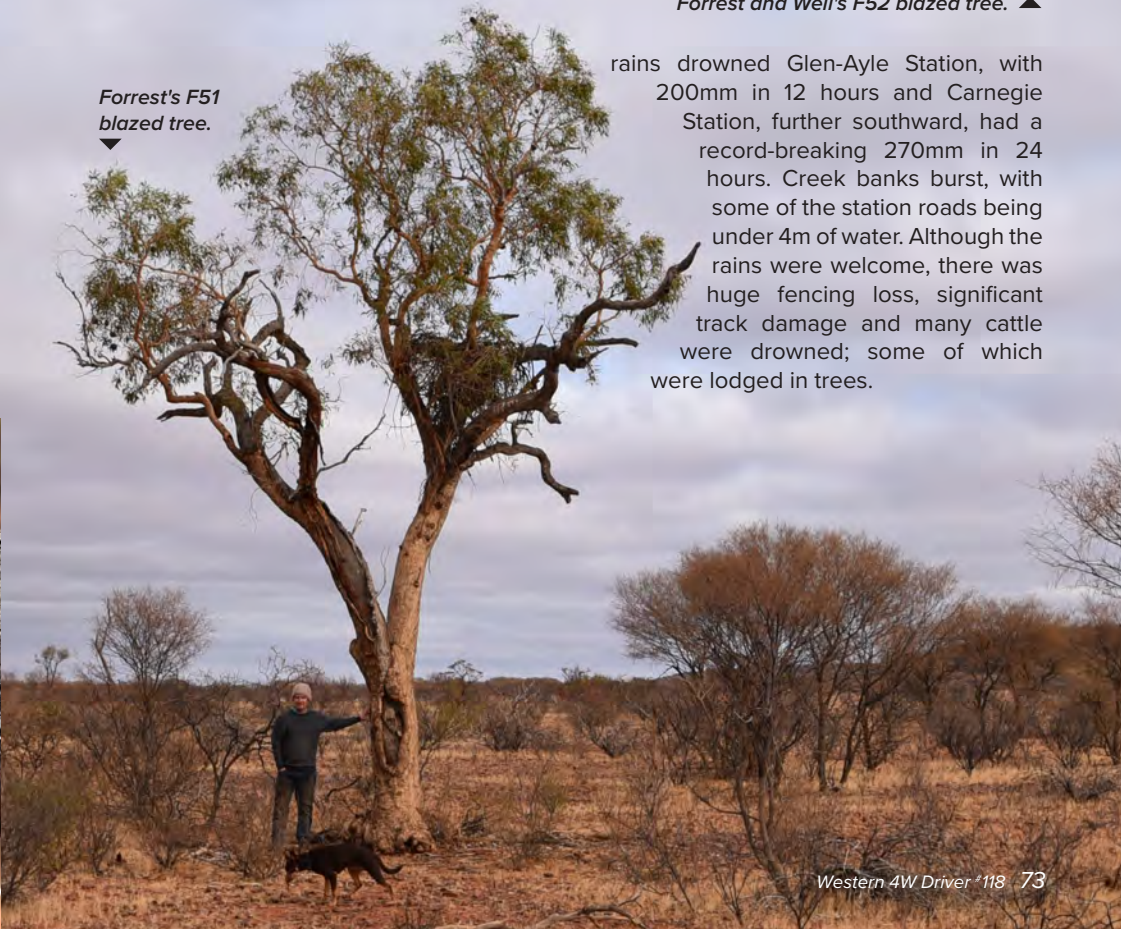
We had permission to use station tracks to get to Carnegie Station to refuel and shower. Near Carnegie Station Homestead was Forrest's eaten out F52 blaze on a live corkwood tree. It was at one of the waterholes on Cooringanarranda Brook. The remains of a grown over blaze cut by explorer Lawrence Wells on 31st July 1896 is also on this tree.

While we were at Carnegie Station, we were told that around 10th January 2020 huge



Forrest and Well's F52 blazed tree. ▲

Forrest's F51 blazed tree.



rains drowned Glen-Ayle Station, with 200mm in 12 hours and Carnegie Station, further southward, had a record-breaking 270mm in 24 hours. Creek banks burst, with some of the station roads being under 4m of water. Although the rains were welcome, there was huge fencing loss, significant track damage and many cattle were drowned; some of which were lodged in trees.



▲ Forrest's F59 blazed tree.

The manager at Carnegie Station also told us that soon after the rains, around the homestead, hundreds of turtles dug their way to ground level. My alter ego, Truthful Phil, ever on guard against reprisals was sceptical about this. He had heard of burrowing frogs but burrowing turtles! Anyway, back in civilisation the internet tells of a flat-shelled long-necked turtle, *Chelodina steindachneri*, that inhabits the area and that they have evolved to survive the harsh conditions by being dormant between rains. Truthful Phil's caution was placated, declaring Australia's animals never cease to amaze.

On the Gunbarrel Highway and heading eastward and then southward along the David Carnegie Road, our next target was Forrest's Camp F59. The turn off to the camp is located 40km south of the junction and then 4.5km east. We located the blaze on a living gum tree, but it was eaten out long ago. Northward of the blaze, some 1.6km away is a large rockhole Forrest named Windich Rockhole after Tommy Windich, who found it. This rockhole is usually dry, but on some occasions there is water in it although it may be covered in animal faeces and green slime. A visit

▼ Windich Rockhole.



to both features is worthwhile but they can be difficult to find because they are rarely visited, and the wheel pad to them is basically non-existent.

While Forrest continued his traverse eastward, we returned to the Gunbarrel and continued east, then took the Hunt Oil Road (HOR) southward. Geraldton Bore, with a hand pump, is located at the junction. This spot also offers great camping among the trees. Please note that while the hand pump functions most of the time, don't rely on it. Have a backup plan in case you cannot get water there.

The HOR is a well-used track, with the top end traversing vast open plains of spinifex, growing almost wheatfield like. However, despite being well used, early in the season the spinifex growth on the track can be a dangerous problem with a high risk of under vehicle fires. Do fit a spinifex guard on the front of your vehicle and regularly check for spinifex build up and remove it with gloves and a billy hook.

Approaching Sutherland Range, which is some 106km south of Geraldton Bore along the HOR, the country drops some 40m in elevation and the creek lines, mulga and gum trees become more prolific, providing numerous camping opportunities.

Forrest arrived in the area on 13th July 1874 and spent some time here exploring and naming features. He named Mt Allott and Mt Worsnop after the Mayor and Town Clerk of Adelaide respectively, and nearby the Alexander Spring after his brother and expedition member. Mt Worsnop, a mesa, provides 360° views of the desert and the range; Mt Allot, a prominent headland of the range provides extensive views north, west and south with Mt Worsnop being prominent. On top of Mt Allott is another Stan Gratte 1974 Forrest Centenary retracing expedition plaque.



Mt Allott plaque. ▲
Photo: Alan McCall

The vast plains of the Hunt Oil Road. ▼



In naming Alexander Spring, Forrest was to cause much angst among future explorers and prospectors including Carnegie, Hubbe, Carr-Boyd and Woodhouse. This was because on arrival they expected to find a spring, only to discover it was not a spring but a rock hole and often it was dry.

To the south of Mt Worsnop is Woodhouse Lagoon, a freshwater lake that occasionally has water. Fossicking around the edge of the lake will often reward with stone artefacts of Aboriginal origin. By all means look, but please leave them where you found them.

Our trip following Forrest ceased here because we were unable to obtain permits for access or to travel further eastward due to the COVID-19 pandemic and no access being permitted to any Aboriginal communities.



Local resident. ▲

Forrest continued his journey via Blyth Creek, Warburton Range, Fort Mueller, Skirmish Hill, Musgrave Range and completed the expedition on arrival at Peake Telegraph Station.

Following the 1874 expedition of Big John, as he was often called, was a most rewarding trip. Finding Forrest-named features, together with the blazed trees, although eaten out, was incredibly special and being out in such striking desert country was awe inspiring.



Alexander Spring. ▼



INFORMATION BAY

Permits are required for CSR access. Application can be made online at:
permits.canningstockroute.net.au

Permit requirements for access to the Gunbarrel Highway, David Carnegie Road and Hunt Oil Road may have changed due to the Gibson Nature Reserve coming under joint management with the Ngaanyatjarra people in late 2020. Check this site: www.ngaanyatjarra.org.au or www.dplh.wa.gov.au/entrypermits

For access to any pastoral station always seek permission beforehand as your presence may interfere with mustering or other station work.

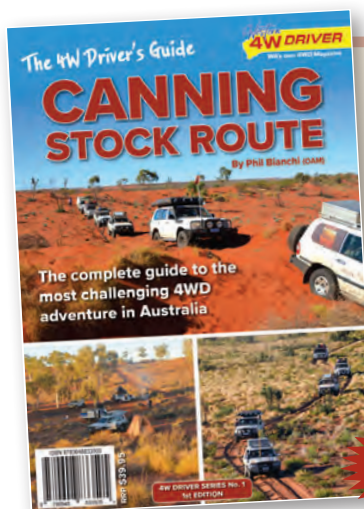
Fees are payable for access to and from the CSR via Glen-Ayle Station (08 9981 2989) or Granite Peak Station (08 9981 2983).

Other than travelling on the Gunbarrel Hwy or Carnegie Glenayle Road, permission to travel on Carnegie Station is required (08) 9981 2991.

Carnegie Station sells fuel and at the time of our visit it was \$2.50 per litre. They also provide camping and have dongas available as well.

For a comprehensive CSR travel guide order a copy of
The 4W Driver's Guide - Canning Stock Route by Phil Bianchi
www.western4wdriver.com.au/shop

John Forrest's expedition journals are published in
Explorations in Australia by John Forrest.



HAVE YOU GOT YOURS?

Travellers can use this guide to plan their trip using the wealth of information provided along with detailed Hema maps showing the location of all the wells and other sites along the length of the CSR.

Order your copy today from
www.western4wdriver.com.au/shop

\$39.95