



Cleared for Take-Off: Gingin to Baladjie Rock



Six months. That's how long Gingin held onto us, one appointment at a time, until the neuro review finally delivered the verdict we'd been angling for: *pace yourself, but you're clear to travel*. Not exactly a starter's gun, more a gentle nod — but after half a year in one postcode, a gentle nod is all we needed. The rig got packed, everything got checked, and we pointed east into the wheatbelt like we'd never left.

Wyalkatchem: a warning, politely delivered

First stop was Wyalkatchem — “Wylie” to everyone who actually lives there — a tidy little town that once made history as the first place in WA to load wheat in bulk instead of by the



backbreaking bagful. We weren't there for the grain silos, though. A physio session was booked in, and it did exactly what physio sessions do: handed over an exercise regime, a few pointed warnings, and the now-familiar refrain of *travel with caution*. We're getting used to being cleared for departure with an asterisk attached. Noted, filed, and onward.

Mukinbudin: old friends, cold nights, and a blue tree

From Wylie it was on to Mukinbudin — Mukka, if you're a local — a friendly little farming town about three and a half hours from Perth, sitting right in the middle of granite outcrop country. This is also where the Blue Tree Project began: locals turned a story of loss into something hopeful by painting dead trees blue, a splash of colour against all that wheat-gold flatness that you can't help but slow down for.

You can get the full story here; <https://bluetreeproject.com.au/>

The real drawcard, though, was catching up with Steve and Wendy — our off-and-on travelling companions who seem to have a knack for turning up wherever we do. One overnight in Mukka, a dash through the IGA to restock the essentials, and the obligatory pilgrimage to Wyalki Bakers for fuel of the carbohydrate variety. Some habits are non-negotiable, travel warnings or not.

Baladjie Rock: leading SWOOSH astray

An hour and a bit later we'd lobbed. Baladjie Rock.

And then, the whole point of the detour: Baladjie Rock, a granite outcrop tucked into its own nature reserve on the edge of a salt lake system, north of Westonia. Steve and Wendy posing as SWOOSH Life Is An Adventure — seasoned wheatbelt wanderers that they are — had somehow never made it out here. So this trip, it was our turn to do the leading.



We're leading Steve and Wendy from Swoosh astray this trip. Feet up for half an hour to get accustomed to the flies, and then we'll do a short walking tour around but not up over the granite — the kind of climb that would reward you with a view clean over the lake and the woodland beyond, the sort of quiet that 7 weeks of hospital corridors would make you appreciate all over again — just not yet.

Pace yourself, they said. Yeah, right. We're working on it.