

# Coorong National Park

## Coorong Self-guided History Trail



Government of  
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The Coorong holds great interest in relation to early European exploration of South Australia. The area was a major section of the overland stock route, mail coach route, migrant route and telegraph line route between Adelaide and Melbourne.

Join us on a self-guided tour of some highlighted historic locations and enjoy the Coorong, the scenery and its abundant wildlife which amazed early European settlers.

## 1. Point Malcolm Lighthouse

The Point Malcolm Lighthouse is Australia's only inland lighthouse. At 7m, it is also our smallest.

It was built by Richard Trenouth, a well-known builder from Strathalbyn, at a cost of £1043 for both the tower and keeper's cottage. It operated between 1878 and 1931 to mark the narrow passage between Lake Albert and Lake Alexandrina at a time when fishing boats, sailing vessels and cargo steamers regularly plied the waterways. By the early twentieth century the paddle steamers *Judith*, *Milang* and *Murray* were carrying passengers, goods and mail up to three times a week between Milang, Narrung and Meningie.

The lighthouse was turned off in September 1931, due a decline in water traffic. An automatic light on a pole was installed to guide commercial and recreational craft using the river and Lakes.

The lighthouse is now on private land and the privately owned keeper's cottage has been restored. It is clearly visible from the road and nearby Narrung ferry. A walking trail allows you to visit.



Point Malcolm lighthouse and keeper's cottage  
Photo: Christopher Thompson

**Directions:** at Ashville, turn off the Princes Highway on to the Potalloch Road. Travel 16kms towards the Narrung ferry to view the lighthouse.

## 2. Mark Point Mill

The Mark Point Mill is one of four mills originally built on the Yalkuri property about 1880-1890.

Stock to and from Victoria and the south east of South Australia travelled along the Coorong which contained many freshwater springs. Crossings where cattle and horses were driven from the mainland to the Younghusband Peninsula and back again were made at the Murray Mouth and Pelican Point, a few kilometres north of this mill.

Tanks and troughs were made from local limestone and mortar from locally burnt lime. The length of the trough (originally 28m, but shortened in 1959 to 15m) suggests that many thousands of sheep, cattle and horses were watered here. The mill is now situated within the Coorong National Park.



Mark Point Mill Photo: Christopher Thompson

**Directions:** From the lighthouse, take the ferry across the water to Narrung. Travel towards Meningie for 32kms. Turn right onto the unsealed Loveday Bay Road. After 6kms, turn left on to the unsealed Mark Point Road. After 5kms, turn left at Mark Point and go through the gate.

From Meningie, follow the Narrung Road for 25kms. Turn left onto the unsealed Loveday Bay Road. After 6kms, turn left on to the unsealed Mark Point Road. After 5kms, turn left at Mark Point and go through the gate.

You will need 4WD to drive to the Mill, otherwise it is a 500m walk.

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## 3. Parnka Point

Parnka Point near Magrath Flat is the narrowest part of the Coorong lagoon. There was a hand pulled punt at this point for many years.

In the nineteenth century a length of wire was stretched across the lagoon as a guide and as a means of pulling the punt across to the Younghusband Peninsula which was farmed at the time under a grazing lease.

The punt was big enough to carry a small horse and cart or a small car. Looking out over the water, you will notice wooden poles in the water. These are remnants of the crossing.

*Parnka* is a Ngarrindjeri word for sandy beach and the area is noted for excellent views up and down the lagoon. Wading birds are commonly seen foraging in the mudflats of the shallow and sheltered bays nearby.



*Parnka Point*  
Photo: Christopher Thompson

**Directions:** turn off the Princes Highway either 23kms south of Meningie or 122kms north of Kingston. Travel 4kms along the unsealed road to Parnka Point in the Coorong National Park.

## 4. Replica Oil Rig

In 1852 while looking for stray horses, troopers from a gold transport found what they described as natural oil springs.

The discovery of this elastic substance on the ground near Salt Creek began 80 years of interest in oil exploration in the region.

Exploratory leases were made available in 1878. In 1892 the Salt Creek Petroleum Company undertook a full scale drilling operation, the first in Australia.

From 1903, the Coorong Oil Company leased 32,000 acres south-west of Salt Creek and drilled several wells.

No oil was ever found and in 1930 it was shown that the substance, Coorongite, was a surface vegetable product and not of mineral origin.



*Replica oil rig at Salt Creek*  
Photo: Christopher Thompson

**Directions:** the replica oil rig is located in the township of Salt Creek, 60kms south of Meningie and 85kms north of Kingston SE.

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## 5. Salt Harvesting

When it was found that salt could be used to improve those pastures in the South East suffering from mineral deficiency, salt harvesting became an important operation. For many years this activity provided a regular income for a few local families.

From the 1870s salt was raked under licence on at least two salt lagoons near the Coorong. One of these was the lagoon on the peninsula opposite Stony Well Island. The other lagoon was south of Salt Creek on the Old Melbourne Road (located on the Lakes Nature Trail).

Here you can still see the remains of a substantial stone embankment built across the lake to dam and control water levels. After the salt was raked by hand, it was transported by tip trolley on moveable narrow gauge tracks to the north-west end of the lake's edge. The salt was then bagged and taken to Kingston SE. Some 200-400 tons were harvested each year, until the area was incorporated into Coorong National Park.



Remnants from the salt harvesting industry, seen along the Lakes Nature Trail. Photo: Christopher Thompson

**Directions:** turn off the Princes Highway, approximately 500m south of Salt Creek or 65kms north of Kingston on to the unsealed Loop Road. Follow the signs to the Lakes Nature Trail. You will also catch glimpses of the salt lake from the Loop Road as you drive by.



Chinaman's Well

Photo: Christopher Thompson

## 6. Chinaman's Well

A step back in time, this area has a unique place in the local history of the gold rush days and the establishment of stock, mail and communications routes.

Soon after the founding of South Australia, it was imperative that land communication links be forged with the established eastern colonies.

The first transportation route was pioneered in 1839 by stockmen overlanding cattle from Victoria. By the late 1860's, the Coorong Road was frequented by stockmen, government surveyors, police dispatch riders, coaches and immigrants.

The mail route following the Coorong Road was established in the late 1840's and also provided a passenger service.

The Adelaide – Melbourne telegraph line was opened for service in 1858, making it the first intercolonial line in Australia. When the line was abandoned, the telegraph poles were cut down near ground level.

In the early 1850's during the initial rush to find gold in Victoria, South Australia had the only free port for Chinese immigrants. Many ships diverted to South Australian ports to offload passengers who then travelled along the Coorong to the goldfields.

The location now known as Chinaman's Well, has a reliable supply of water from a nearby soak and is thought to have been established by the Chinese to supply the travelling public with fresh water and vegetables.

The well was built in about 1856. The curved limestone blocks and the sandstone cap on the top of the well were obtained from nearby quarries.

Allow yourself plenty of time to explore the area, follow the trail and the signs to find the well, associated quarries, stock watering trough, the remains of an eating house and the foundations and stumps of telegraph poles.

**Directions:** 16km south of Salt Creek along the Princes Highway, the main car park at Chinaman's Well is reached by a 1.3km smooth unsealed access road. There are two stopping points along the road where you can view evidence of stone excavation for the well and associated interpretive signage.

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## 7. Wreck of the Margit

Although the coast of the Coorong Ninety Mile Beach offers no menace in the form of hidden reefs or hazards, the frequent onshore gales create a terrible lee shore that was often impossible to struggle away from or avoid. The waters are rich in shipwreck history, but few remains are visible today to give testimony to the fact.

Destined for Falmouth in England from Victor Harbor, the *SV Margit* foundered on the Coorong beach on November 11, 1911.

The *Margit* was a three masted iron barque, built in 1891 by CJ Bigger in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. Originally called the *Craiglands*, she was 226 feet in length, 36.4 feet across the beam, 21.9 feet deep, and registered in Larvik, Norway.

When the *Margit* ran ashore, she was carrying a cargo of 23,835 bags of wheat. Heavy seas delayed the crew getting ashore, but all were rescued. A salvage crew reported that the vessel laid upright in the sand. However, she was so firmly embedded that her hull was ten feet deep in semi-quick-sand, and there was no chance of salvage.



*Wreck of the 'Margit'. Image courtesy of State Library of South Australia - PRG 280/ 1/ 44/ 324*

**Directions:** Wreck Crossing is on the Old Coorong Road, 65kms north of Kingston SE or 35kms south of Salt Creek. Follow the crossing to the beach and glimpses of the remnants of the wreck may be seen at low tide, a few hundred metres north, about 50m off the beach in the surf. You will need 4WD and experience in driving in soft sand to visit the site.

### Did you know?

The Wreck Crossing which travels from the mainland, over the dunes of the Young-husband Peninsula to the ocean beach is named for the *Margit* Wreck.

The 28 Mile, 32 Mile and 42 Mile Crossings are named for the distance they are from the township of Kingston, SE.

## For more information

**COORONG NATIONAL PARK**  
Department of Environment and Water  
Upper South East District

1063 Seven Mile Road  
Noonameena  
via Meningie SA 5264

P (+61 8) 8575 1200

E [DEW.SEOnlineBookings@sa.gov.au](mailto:DEW.SEOnlineBookings@sa.gov.au)

[www.parks.sa.gov.au/coorong](http://www.parks.sa.gov.au/coorong)