





## History of the Yilgarn District

Explorers had passed through the area decades before gold was discovered, including Henry Lefroy (1863), Charles Cooke Hunt (1864) and John Forrest (1869) all of whom declared that the area had great agricultural potential. The area had also been explored by numerous sandalwood pullers. The eastern edge of the region overlaps the goldfields, and prospectors began moving into the area in the 1880s. Traces of gold were found in the district around the Golden Valley area in 1887.

The town owes a lot to the discovery of gold and to Tom Riseley and Mick Toomey, who named the area after the Southern Cross, the constellation they used to help them navigate their way when travelling at night. Southern Cross literally "boomed" over night, the gold lay in hard reefs.

The first major gold discovery in the Eastern Goldfields region occurred at Southern Cross. It predates the larger towns to the east and therefore has a special relationship with Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie, being referred to as the mother town of Coolgardie (the old Camp) and the grandmother of Kalgoorlie (Golden Mile). The discoveries of Thomas Riseley and Mick Toomey in 1887–88 established the area as an important goldfield.

Further discoveries occurred in and around the region. The town's growth was dramatic. It became a gazetted frontier town in 1890 and had the first regional courthouse (1891). It was in this building that Arthur Bayley registered the claim which subsequently became the rich fields at Coolgardie in 1892; Paddy Hannan took out his Miner's Right before he made his famous discovery in 1893; and the first claim on the Lake Dundas (Norseman) goldfields was registered in 1894.

By 1893 Southern Cross had become a municipality and in 1894 the railway arrived from Perth linking the town to the coast. When A.W. Bayley rode into Southern Cross with 554 oz of alluvial gold which he had found at Fly Flat (now Coolgardie), the miners who were working the hard Southern Cross reef gold literally disappeared overnight and moved to the more lucrative eastern fields.

The 1892 Bayley and Ford discovery led to a massive gold rush. Soon after the Goldfields Road, sometimes called the Coolgardie Road, was established roughly following Hunt's original track with two coach services starting in 1893 and 1894 to take advantage of the increasing population and passenger traffic along this rough and difficult road.

During 1895 and 1896 the railway was extended between Southern Cross and Coolgardie and permanent water harvesting and storage facilities were developed. As testament to the harsh conditions the region has numerous lone grave sites mostly dating back to the late 1880s.

The famous water pipeline engineered by C.Y. O'Connor commenced in 1898, reaching Southern Cross and eventually Kalgoorlie in 1903. This provided relief from dependence on this precious resource being brought via rail and/or camel train from Perth. This also allowed the government to start various farm settlement schemes securing the region into a pastoral district.

Pastoralists who had moved into the region in the mid 1800s were joined by ex servicemen and ex miners in the early and late 1920s. A lot suffered due to lack of rainfall, inexperience, and the great depression. This resulted in abandoned farms and land holdings being taken up by or amalgamated into some of the biggest farms in the state. Today the Shire of Yilgarn presents itself as a large and prosperous farming and pastoral district.

The Yilgarn forms part of the rural sector that is one of WA's premier industries. Livestock (for meat and wool) and basic grains (such as oats, barley, wheat and canola) are exported worldwide.

Resources continue to play a large part in the history of the Yilgarn with many mines still operating on the Yilgarn Greenstone Belt producing millions of dollars worth of gold, iron ore, salt, gypsum, nickel and mineral sands annually.

The Yilgarn is a fascinating place that started with sandalwood pulling (still worth over \$4 million annually) and prospecting (with fossicking still a favourite pastime for many in the region), surprising really, considering they were doing this in the same area 150 years ago!

## Southern Cross

A mixture of wheatbelt and gold mining town, 369 km east of Perth on the Great Eastern Highway.

Southern Cross can be seen as either the last town on the edge of the wheatbelt or the first town of the Eastern Goldfields. Southern Cross has vibrant agriculture and a flourishing gold mining industry to sustain it through boom-and-bust cycles.

The town became an important administrative base as the frontiers of the eastern goldfields were developed and played a crucial role in the supply of provisions for the thousands of people and animals that came through the area. The town was gazetted in 1890.

Like so many Goldfields towns, Southern Cross developed wide streets so that camel trains could turn around. However, unlike other towns, it named its streets after stellar associations, hence Sirius Street, Altair Street, Centaur Street, Orion Street, Spica Street, etc.

Today tourism plays an important role in the region as people are attracted to the gold mining ghost towns in the area and, of course, the wild flowers that bloom every spring. Attractions near the town include the Number 6 Pumping Station, the Old Cemetery, Fraser's Mine, Hunt's Soak, Court House, Museum, Wimmera Hill, Dog Park, Skate Park and Aquatic Centre (free).



