

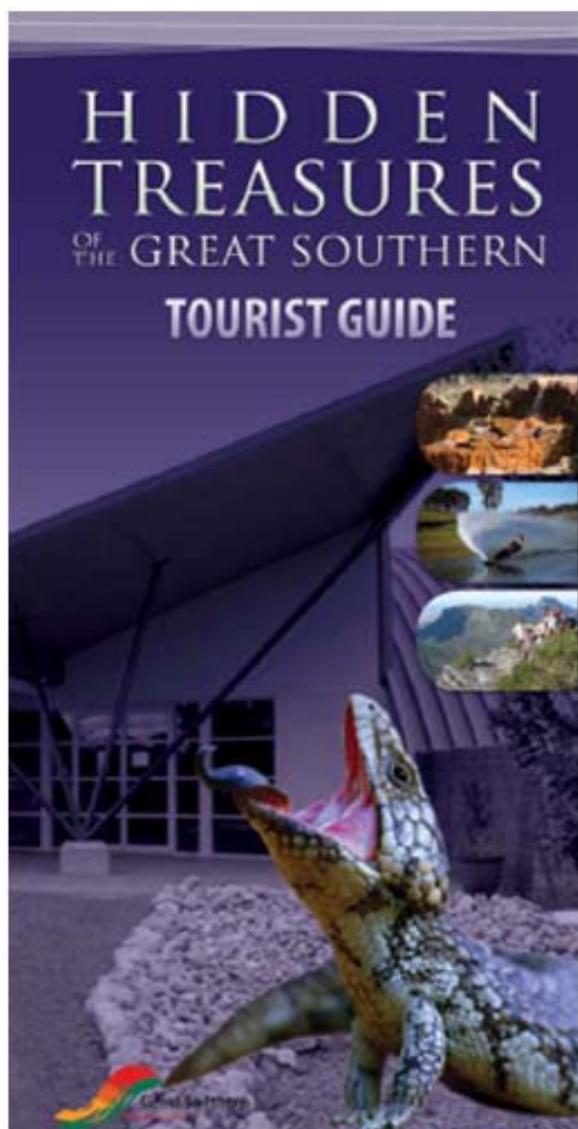
## Seeking hidden treasures in the Great Southern

By Linda Hewson

Almost 100 points of interest, 16 towns, eight shires, six years of hard work, three guidebook editions and one website draws visitors to the hidden treasures of the Great Southern and has those communities looking at themselves in a new light.

Like many great initiatives, *Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern* was inspired by a simple concept. Six years ago two Broomehill women, Sue Witham and Di Holly, were observing their small rural community shrink and set about doing their bit to amend the situation by trying to encourage people to come and visit the area.

Tourism had long been promoted as a panacea for assisting communities to become more sustainable, however much of the market interest and industry drive was centred on the coast. Many regional inland communities have struggled to get visitors to stop in their town long enough to have a positive economic impact.



According to Di Holly, neither she nor Sue had any “letters after their names”, however both were actively involved in local business, community development and broader regional initiatives whilst also heavily involved in their family farm businesses.

It was clear that Broomehill as a stand-alone tourist destination would never attract enough individual visitors to have any significant economic impact on the community. Other than putting spikes in the road to make people stop, the only other reasonable option was to talk with neighbouring Shires to see if they were interested in exploring tourism in partnership with Broomehill.

The rationale that underpinned the Hidden Treasures concept was based upon the premise that, through partnership, greater gains could be achieved that might help the entire region. Existing tourism assets in the communities, whether small or large, were encouraged to be more valued than they currently were. Through jointly promoting, linking and developing the ‘Hidden Treasures’ of the area, there would be more products for visitors to experience and this would in turn encourage longer stays in the area, all the while developing a sense of local pride.

Di and Sue visited all the shires within the region and spent hours doing background research on tourism visitation, state initiatives, priorities, visitor expenditure and expectations.

A proposal was presented to each shire for a contribution of \$2,500 which formed the basis of a funding program through the Great Southern Development Commission and the Great Southern Area Consultative Committee.

Funding was then secured based upon the quality of partnership between the shires involved, the passionate commitment of those involved as well as the background evidence that gave the concept credibility.

A workshop day was held in April 2004, in which all the shires and communities participated. The workshop developed the basis of how the Hidden Treasures group would work and also started the process to create an extensive but realistic Destination Marketing & Development Plan, Tourism information and Trail Booklet and a web-site.

After years of attention to tourism development in larger coastal centres, smaller communities and inland communities understandably doubted they had the potential to attract visitors to their regions. Hidden Treasures set about countering this, assisting in establishing strong foundations in these communities, and addressing the initially negative response from some communities when asked what tourism products they had. Each community within the Hidden Treasures area is at a different stage in their tourism lifecycle and, in the early stages, many felt they had nothing to offer.

A key role has been to re-educate communities that there is an increasing number of visitors who wish to immerse themselves in authentic rural Australian life and these people would be attracted to the diversity of products within the Hidden Treasures Region, particularly given its proximity to Perth, and location *en route* to established tourist destinations such as Albany and Esperance.

A key turning point in the project was the delivery of the Hidden Treasures information booklet. Aimed primarily at the visitor market, this booklet also had a profound effect on the local communities of Hidden Treasures, as they finally saw themselves in a different light and there was a realisation that maybe the Hidden Treasures project had some merit.

The Hidden Treasures group simply is a working partnership of shires and communities in the Great Southern region, however it provides a model that is far more complex in terms of balancing the needs of different communities, individuals and ensuring core values of this region are enhanced.

Shires nominate a delegate either from their community or shire without limitation on the number of representatives they wish to attend. All shires have one vote, so the number of delegates at any one meeting ensures information is effectively transmitted through their communities.

Fast forward to 2010 and eight shires are a part of The Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern. The communities within the eight shires include Woodanilling, Cranbrook, Katanning, Kojonup, Muradup, Frankland, Tenterden, Nyabing, Pingrup, Ongerup, Jerramungup, Bremer Bay, Borden (and Stirling Ranges), Gnowangerup, Tambellup and Broomehill.

The third edition guidebook of the *Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern* was launched by the Hon. Mia Davies MLC in Nyabing in October 2010 to an audience who travelled from throughout the Great Southern and beyond.

The guidebook entails an 800 km drive trail taking in lesser known points of interest throughout the great southern region and details. It also gives a history of each of the towns in the region and recommendations for accommodation and places to eat.

The driving trail links all 16 communities in the Hidden Treasures region and is clearly identifiable when on the road through the directional signage containing the iconic bobtail image pointing to each hidden treasure.



*The iconic bobtail trail sign shows the way to each Hidden Treasure.*

Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern chairwoman Di Holly says the booklet is a testament to the hard work of the Hidden Treasures committee, made up entirely of volunteers from the different shires throughout the region, and the ongoing support of the eight shires in the Hidden Treasures region.

“Hidden Treasures is so much more than just this booklet, but this booklet represents our region in a very simple, tangible form,” she said.

“More than just a partnership of shires and communities jointly promoting their tourism assets, the group also endeavours to encourage, support and create opportunities for communities to identify and develop their tourism potential. One such initiative, which took the group over two years to develop, is the Rural Group Tours Tool Kit, which can assist communities, groups and individuals to identify and further develop their potential tourism assets.



At the launch of the Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern third edition in October 2010:

L-R: Kristy Boyle, Tambellup; Ainslie Evans, Katanning; Milton Evans, Regional Development Australia; Cathy Crosby, Nyabing; Gail Vaux, Ongerup; Graham Moss, Tourism Association of WA; Sue Lance, Gnowangerup; Sam Davis, Gnowangerup; Di Holly (with brochures) Broomehill; Russell Pritchard, GSDC; Megan Tuffley, Nyabing; Yvonne Featherstone, Pingrup; Terri Neuzerling, Kojonup; Hon. Mia Davies MLC

“The region is pulling together in such an effective way to help enhance our area as a tourist stop – if not as a final destination, then certainly as an integral place to stop on driving tours or as people are on the way to visit Albany, Esperance or Margaret River,” Di said.

There are almost 100 points of interest identified to cover in 16 different towns and surrounds in the booklet, and booklets can be found in visitor centres, community resource centres and by request from Hidden Treasures of the Great Southern website

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