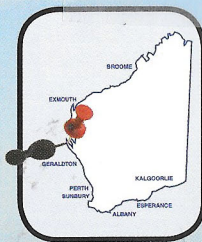


# THE WESTERN EDGE

By Phil Bianchi





**Want to do some serious 4Wheel driving?  
Try the Steep Point peninsula with its  
pristine environment, spectacular vistas  
of beaches, bays and high cliffs.**



If you are keen to fish, here is your best opportunity to catch a big fish from either the beach or the rocks.

The main attractions are pristine beaches, spectacular cliffs and blow holes, superb scenery, sand 4wd driving and fishing. Steep Point is arguably the best land based fishing platform in Australia, with catches including mackerel, snapper, cobia and tailor. Steep Point, located on Carrarang Station, is the most westerly point of the Australian mainland. It is a remote location and vehicle access is by 4WD only. Soft roaders and low clearance 4Wdrives will have great difficulty in crossing the soft and steep sand dunes.

The area is steeped in history. Dirk Hartog in 1616 was the first recorded explorer to visit

*Ian Gibbs Shows off a superb spanish mackerel.*   
*The mainland ends here.* 

## **“Steep Point is arguably the best land based fishing platform in Australia”**

The whole area west of Useless Loop is a pastoral lease that will soon to become a National Park. See the website [www.steepoint.com.au](http://www.steepoint.com.au) for the latest access requirements during the transition phase from a sheep station to a National Park.

The website also provides significant visitor information.

On the western side of the Steep Point peninsula are the Zuytdorp Cliffs, (pronounced Zurtoff) in places up to 100 metres high. The Indian Ocean crashing against these cliffs provides sightseers with many fantastic photographic opportunities.

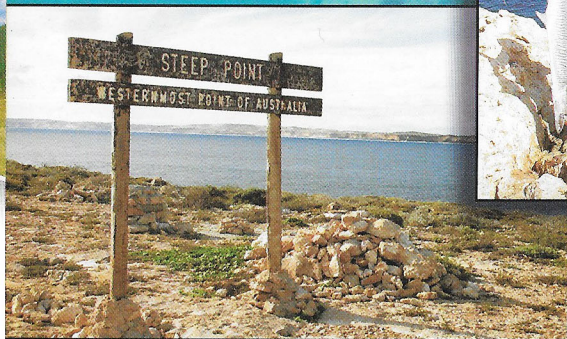
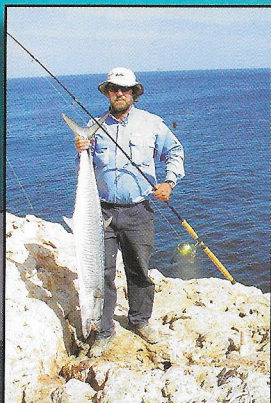
On the eastern side, or Shark Bay side of the peninsula are numerous protected coves and sandy beaches where one can go swimming and fishing.

From a fishing point of view Steep Point, in summer, is alive with fishermen casting lures or gas ballooning for pelagic fish. If not fishing, many a fascinating hour can be spent watching these serious fishermen

going about their business, the fishing techniques they use and the adrenaline pumping excitement when they land a big one.

Some parts of the peninsular, such as Crayfish Bay, are very remote and accessible only via very steep and soft sand dunes. If going to such areas inform the Ranger so he can advise you of the latest conditions and in case you don't return he can track you down.

If visiting the Steep Point peninsula, the dirt track as far as Cloughs Bar can



the region. He was followed by others including de Vlamingh, Dampier, Baudin and Grey.

A look at any map of the area will reveal many amusing place names such as Useless Loop, False Entrance, Thunder Bay, Crayfish Bay, Unknown Island and Blind Inlet. Someone had a good sense of humour!



be accessed by 2wdrive vehicles, however the section of track after the Useless Loop turn off is usually badly corrugated. From Cloughs Bar a high clearance 4wd with low range is essential.

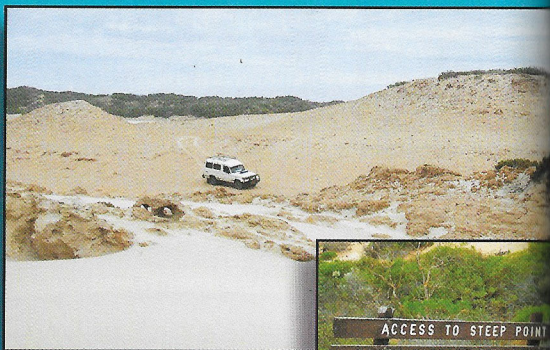
You will be required to let your tyres down to at least 20 psi to negotiate the high and very soft dunes. Ensure you have a quality tyre pump and gauge to check your tyres and reinflate them when leaving the area.

Failure to keep your tyre pressures down will result in track damage, and the Ranger asking you to leave the park. Do the right thing and don't try any hard luck stories; he won't make exceptions, be warned!

Probably the most difficult dune to cross is the first after leaving Cloughs Bar. It seems to go on forever and just when you think you are at the top you find it continues. This dune is often very soft.

Many people whilst trying to negotiate this hill, try to change down when they run out of revs, only to find they have to reverse all the way to the bottom and start again. If pulling a trailer, reversing down isn't fun so keep your revs up, choose the correct gear and don't be tempted to change down.

All tracks in the area are self made and



▲ *Negotiating the Dunes Near Crayfish Bay.*

*Observe the rules for the sake of your vehicle and the environment.* ▶



before arriving at the Point; this can be obtained via the website. The Ranger's residence is located 9 kilometres from Steep Point, call in and register, pay fees and receive any special instructions. At the time of writing the fees were, an access fee of \$22 per vehicle, a \$5.00 per day per person camping fee and a \$100 (refundable) environmental levy. The levy is charged to ensure people don't leave rubbish behind and don't damage the tracks with hard tyres and irresponsible driving.

These fees may change when the area becomes a National Park and comes

**“Don't try any hard luck stories with the ranger, he won't make exceptions.”**

wander left and right around dunes, driving in the dunes area will certainly test and improve your sand driving skills. The average speed is around 15 to 20 kph. Don't be tempted to carve out new tracks in the vegetated areas, stick to those regularly used, we need to preserve what little vegetation cover exists.

You need to obtain an entry permit

under full control of the Department of Environment and Conservation.

As you approach Steep Point itself, the track leaves the secluded bays on the northern side of the peninsula and takes you south west to the Zuytdorp Cliffs facing the Indian Ocean. These very high and dangerous cliffs plummet almost vertically into the ocean. If you have children take special care of them



here, these very high cliffs are dangerous and falling off them will result in almost certain death!

Near the lighthouse is the most western point of the Australian mainland and travellers who having made the pilgrimage to this spot have over the years built rock cairns to commemorate their achievement.

Continuing along the main track you arrive at the famous northward facing rock fishing platforms. Dozens of fisherman camp here, attracted by the opportunity to catch pelagic fish. They cast lures or use lighter than air gas filled balloons to take their baits 100 to 150 metres out to sea. In summer the prevailing south west breeze blows 24 hours a day.

Should you intend to fish, talk to fisherman already there about what spots are available. Each spot is closely guarded and the better spots are taken in a pecking order of who arrived first.



▲ Protected bays near the ranger's house are best for camping.

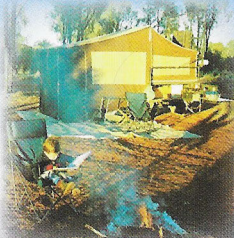
Most fishermen will be helpful, even showing you their catch or the best techniques to use at the point. You will also be surprised to find that most of them leave their fishing gear, including expensive rods, reels and lures on the rocks 24 hours a day.

You can camp at the point, however if you are not fishing it's best to camp at the beach in one of the tranquil coves near the Ranger's house. Camping at the point can be shoulder to shoulder

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and there is no room for privacy. Park your vehicle and take a walk along the fishing platforms. Turtles and shoals of fish are often seen, as are flocks of birds circling around bait schools further out to sea. To the north, across the strait known as South Passage, are the high cliffs of Dirk Hartog Island. In times of high seas giant waves crash against them causing massive sprays up the cliff faces.

Another very interesting part of the peninsula is the False Entrance side. To get there return to Cloughs Bar and then to the T junction with the road to the Overlander Road House. Head south until the track reaches the cliffs. Here you will have unbelievable views of the Indian Ocean; these very high cliffs go all the way south to Kalbarri. There isn't an access track further south.

As the track nears the cliffs you will find two large blow holes, in heavy seas and crashing waves, water will be forced up these from the ocean below, making for a most spectacular sight.

When following the main track north-west, take every side track you encounter on your left to the cliffs, they are only a few hundred metres or so long. At each of these spots you will have excellent views across the Indian Ocean and up and down the cliff face.

One of these spots is a place we have nicknamed 'the washing machine'.

A horse shoe shaped section of the cliff has fallen away leaving a large gaping hole in the cliff face, providing a rugged and spectacular viewing platform. Waves crash into this hole and create a cauldron of water and foam, demonstrating the power of the ocean. There is no escape should you be unfortunate enough to fall.

At False Entrance point you will have commanding views over the Indian Ocean and False Entrance Bay. False Entrance point is another superb fishing platform for bottom dwellers and pelagic fish.

Over the years we have caught many superb fish here. For those who wish to do some 'fish prospecting' and want to explore other fishing opportunities, walk back along the cliff face, on the Indian Ocean side, from the point and look for spots where the reef apron allows you to retrieve your bait or lures. Many fine snapper have been caught along this stretch of coast.

False Entrance was so named because seafarers travelling up the coast often mistook this bay as the entrance to Shark Bay between Steep Point and Dirk Hartog Island.



*The washing machine - not a good swimming spot. ▲  
▼ The Blowholes at False Entrance.*





To get to the beach at False Entrance leave False Entrance Point and back track along the track towards the blow holes, take a track to the left, and after numerous left and rights around dunes you will arrive on the beach. This is a magnificent place to walk and beach comb.

Crayfish Bay is another spectacular spot and is further north from False Entrance, but to reach it you will need to be a very experienced 4wheel driver, with excellent sand driving skills and preferably in a vehicle with diff locks. This drive isn't for the inexperienced and poorly prepared!

Follow False Entrance beach around to the north, and before the beach ends turn off to the right into an area of sand dunes. The place is easy to find because the beach sand dunes flatten out and vegetation ceases. Keep heading north into the dune area, but do take great care to drive around dunes and not over the top of



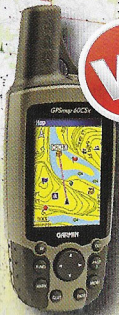
▲ *Be prepared for serious corrugations in and out of Steep Point.*

them. Some dunes may have very high and almost vertical drop offs on the northern face, falling off one of these could have catastrophic results.

Use a GPS to keep track of your route to the area and use the track back feature to find your way out and back to False Entrance Bay. Once you have passed an old windmill, you will need to determine the best place where to turn west out of the dunes to Crayfish

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Bay. If you don't have a GPS do not attempt to go to Crayfish Bay, because it is very difficult to find landmarks, there aren't any tracks because of the constant changing nature of the dunes and it's easy to get lost. Take a long handled shovel with you as bogging is almost a certainty; and ensure you have a quality tyre pump and tyre pressure gauge as well. Also for safety sake, ensure there are at least two vehicles in your convoy, there is no RAC out here and there may not be another vehicle for days or even weeks.

Folk lore has it that Crayfish Bay is so named because in the early days you could walk out onto the reef at low tide and pick up crayfish.

Once at Crayfish Bay take the steep and very rocky walk trial from the turn around parking bay; it leads northward towards a number of fishing platforms.



Excerpt from DLI's Streetsmart WA state map, CL 14/2006

We have regularly picked up 2 kilo plus tailor here and usually with lures. It's probably the only place I have ever fished that provides tailor regardless of the time of day. Note: camping is not permitted at Crayfish Bay.

Why go to Steep Point, False Entrance and Crayfish Bay? Because it's a pristine environment, the 4wheel driving is great, the scenery is fantastic and the fishing is even better.

## Trip Planning and Preparation

Be self sufficient; ensure you have enough fuel, food, water and all other supplies. The nearest supply points to Steep Point are Denham or the Overlander Road House. Useless Loop is a closed mining town, no access is permitted.

A quality tyre pump is essential; you will be required to reinflate your tyres. If towing a trailer, be warned the sand dunes are steep and soft, many a vehicle has been unable to negotiate the dunes and forced to turn back.

Permits: A permit or booking system for entry to Steep Point is in place and information and forms can be down loaded from

<http://www.steeppoint.com.au/permit.htm>

Fees: A number of fees apply, Vehicle

fee of \$22, a refundable environmental levy of \$100 and if camping, a daily camping fee \$5.00 per person.

Distances: Overlander Road House to Steep Point 182 kilometres. Overlander Road House to the False Entrance / Steep Point turn off 142 kilometres. False Entrance Steep Point turn off to Crayfish Bay 18 kilometres.

Best time to visit:

Access is available all year round, however in summer it can be very hot, with 40°C temperatures common. The cooler months are the better option if sightseeing and the summer months if land based fishing.