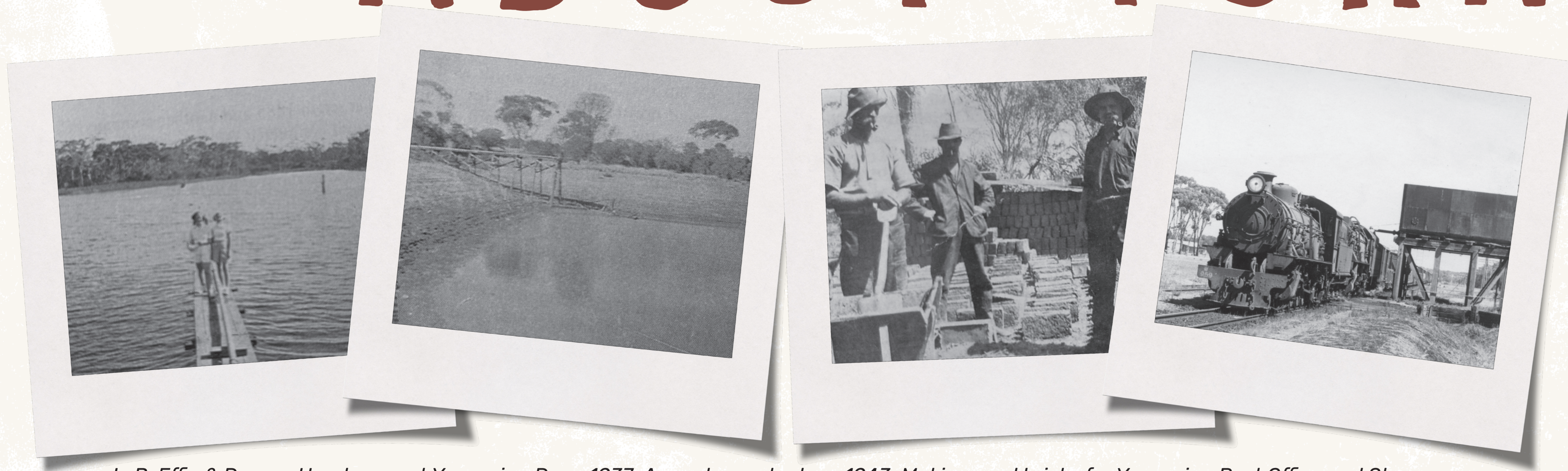


# ABOUT YORNANING DAM



L-R: Effie & Doreen Henderson at Yornaning Dam, 1937; A nearly empty dam, 1943; Making mud bricks for Yornaning Post Office and Store; W class 960 and PR class 526 locomotives filling up with water from the Yornaning Dam, c.1960. Photo: J. Joyce, Rail Heritage WA P17223.

## THE AGE OF STEAM

The Yornaning Dam was built in 1896 to provide water for steam trains on the Great Southern railway going from Perth to Albany. Yornaning town boasted a school, a post office and general store, and a railway station with refreshment rooms. You can see the site of the Yornaning school on the right as you drive from the highway turnoff to the dam.

The dam was originally supplied by the Hotham River South Branch (or Cuballing Brook), but this proved inadequate for the railway needs and in 1909 poor water quality in the river turned the dam water salty.

Local farmer Robert Henderson used dynamite from his mining days to blast a diversion bank that diverted salty Cuballing Brook water from the dam. After that, the Yornaning Dam was supplied by the water catchment reserve and was one of the purest watering points on the Great Southern line.

As the population in Narrogin began to grow, so did the need for water. The Yornaning Dam supplied Narrogin with drinking water by means of water trains until 1958 when the pipe for the Wellington Dam was completed.

## DETERIORATION OF THE DAM

Although two-thirds of the Yornaning Catchment was left as woodland forest, agriculture began to take its toll on the dam.

Annual crops and pastures on cleared land used less water than the original trees and shrubs which led to salinity, not only from saline seeps in the catchment, but also saline water at high pressure under the dam itself.

Runoff from the catchment was high in nitrogen and phosphate.

Over time, nutrients and salinity concentrated in the dam body until the dam water was four-fifths the salinity of the sea, and the sediments in the dam were putrid and devoid of oxygen.

Most animal species in the dam died and the trees and shrubs surrounding the dam were under threat.

*Yornaning Dam is being carefully monitored and managed to ensure the protection and enhancement of the natural habitat and environment.*

## A WHOLE COMMUNITY PROJECT

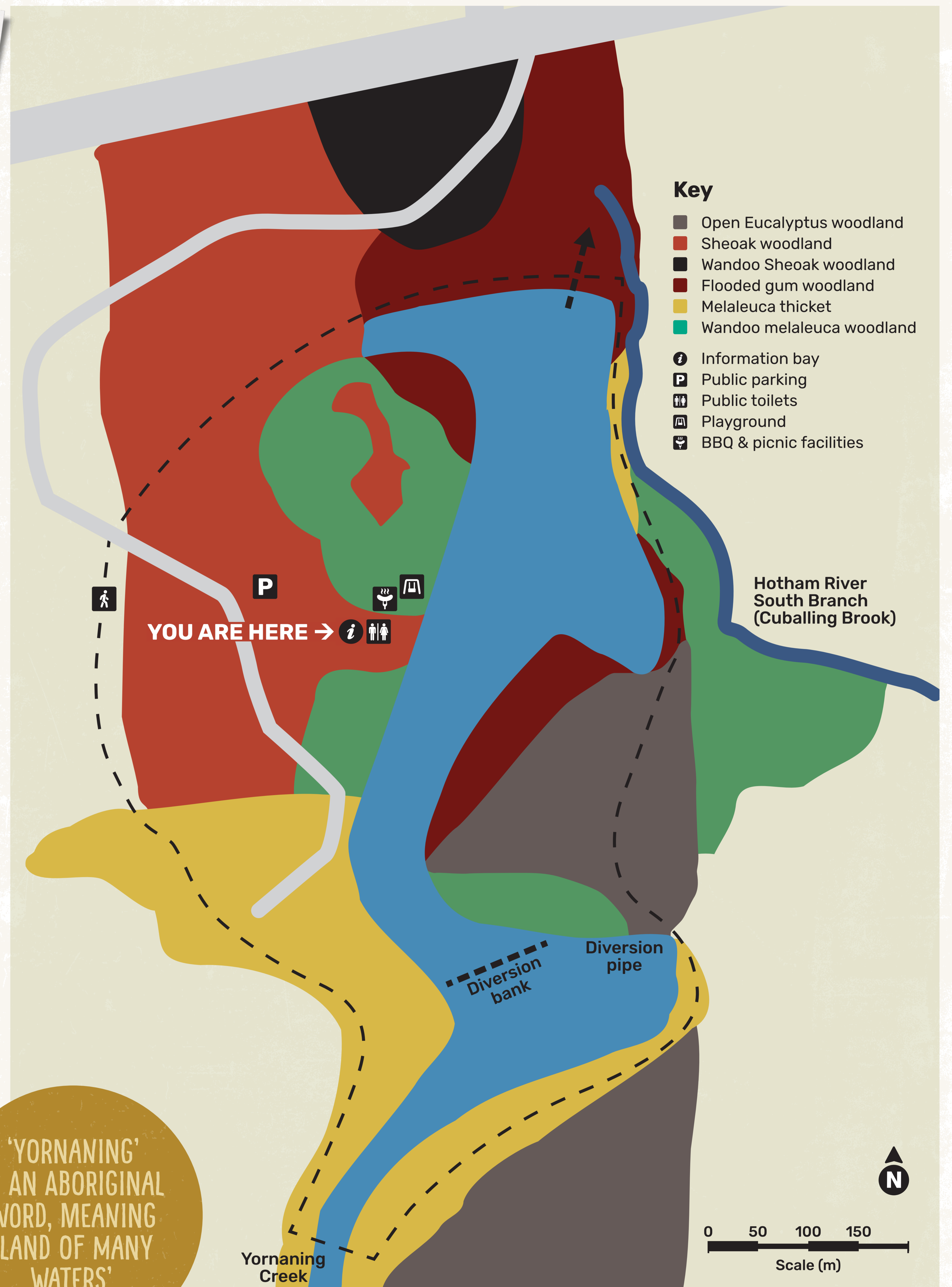
In 1998-99 the farmers in the Yornaning Catchment, with technical help from Murdoch University and funding from the National Landscape Project, established a rehabilitation plan to revive the dam. The Yornaning farmers fenced off and strengthened the creeks running into the dam to stop the flow of nutrients and salt. They put in shallow drains to stop waterlogging, and undertook strategic planting of trees in cleared areas.

The Shire of Cuballing took on the job of rehabilitating the dam site itself, pumping out more than 6,000 cubic metres of water and removing the nutrient-laden sediment from the floor of the dam, which was spread on nearby farms or used for landfill.

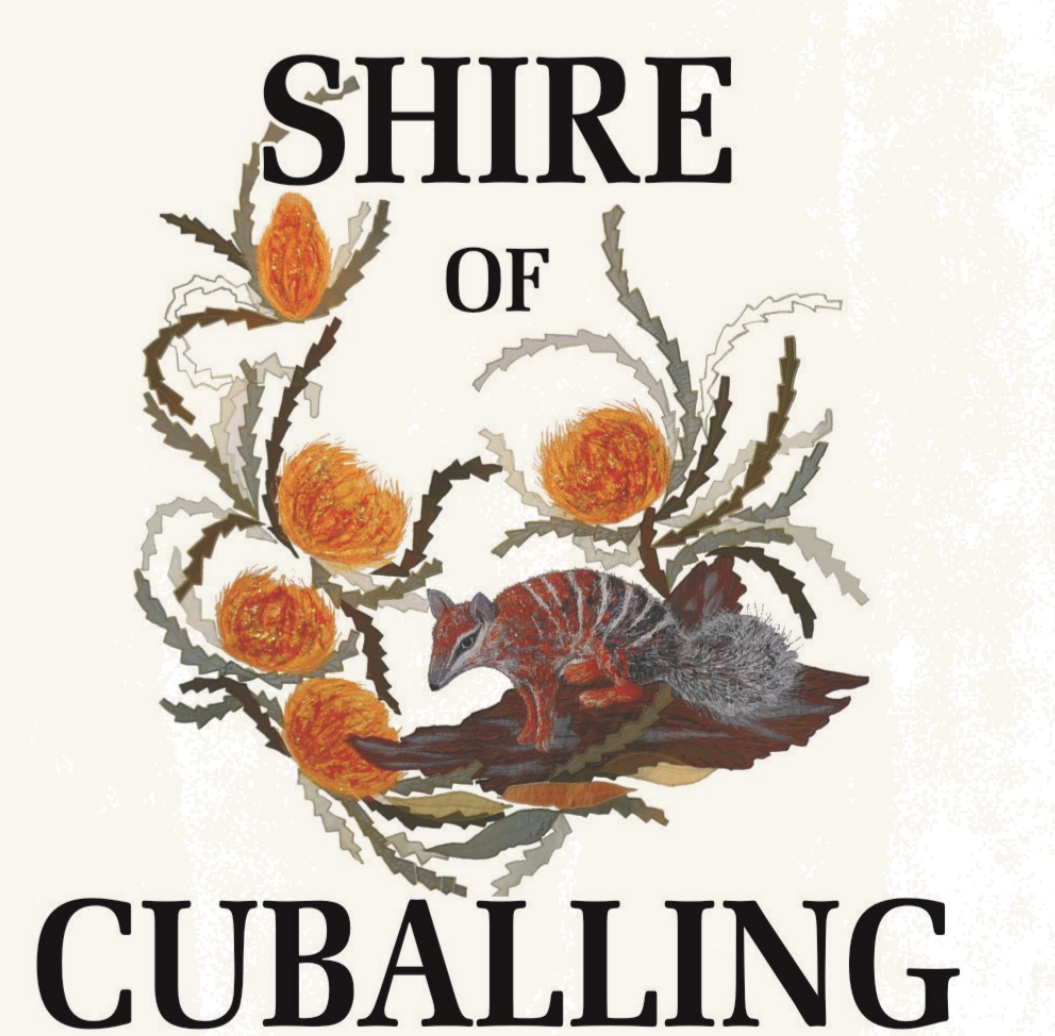
With help from WA Water Authority engineer Graeme Holtfrete, they built a management system that included a sluice-gate to divert the early and late flows from the creeks, which were high in salt and nutrients, away from the dam. Assisted by a diversion siphon which removed poor quality water from the bottom of the dam at strategic times of the year, this system was designed to maintain high quality water in the dam.

## REVIVAL AND REHABILITATION

The desalination works went stale not long after they were completed in 1995, and the dam was left to its own devices. It was not until 2017 that the Shire of Cuballing re-established the rehabilitation project with funding from State Natural Resource Management and Lotterywest, and the area was restored. With improved facilities like public restrooms, bike tracks, walking trails, children's play equipment and picnic tables in a scenic setting, Yornaning Dam is a peaceful, restful retreat for visitors and the local community to enjoy. It is also a prime location for land birds and visiting water birds, and for the many varieties of wildflowers that can be viewed from the walking trails.



'YORNANING' IS AN ABORIGINAL WORD, MEANING 'LAND OF MANY WATERS'.



natural resource management program

