The Tammin Alcoa Landcare Education Centre

Department of Agriculture and Food, Western Australia
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The Tammin Alcoa Landcare Education Centre

If you blinked while driving you could miss Tammin, a small wheatbelt town 180 km east of Perth on the Great Eastern Highway. Shire population: 500. Ideas on land conservation education: big.

The town is home of the Tammin Alcoa Landcare Education Centre. This is an ambitious concept by the Shire of Tammin and the Tammin Action Group to use the whole shire to demonstrate land conservation practices on farms, and to show urban and other communities what Western Australia's farmers are doing to conserve the land and practise sustainable agriculture.

The project is supported financially and in kind by the National Soil Conservation Program, the Alcoa Landcare Project (Tammin is in the Avon River Catchment), the Department of Agriculture and the Ministry of Education. Mike Moran, seconded from the Ministry of Education, and based at Northam, is the co-ordinator of the education centre.

The disused railway barracks have been leased from Westrail and recycled to provide accommodation for groups who spend time at the education centre. They visit various field study sites on farms throughout the Tammin Land Conservation District and use the study centre in the Lesser Town Hall.

Since the first residential groups started in 1991, several hundred school children and teachers from Government and private schools throughout the State have used the centre. The facilities are not costly to use, but not all school groups are able to make the trip to Tammin. Their teachers, who have attended in-service training courses at the education centre, are able to use the ideas they have gained back at their schools.
CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP: This granite outcrop and pool is a popular picnic spot near Tammin.

Tony Blatch (right), Merredin land conservation officer, shows Augusta primary school teacher, Peter Jones, the type of soil beneath their feet.

Grazing stock have eaten out the understorey in this natural bush area.

Teachers inspect the South Tammin Catchment Group’s tree planter.

Use of the centre is not restricted to school groups. Community group leaders interested or involved in landcare can attend in-service training courses with teachers.

So what happens when a group visits the Tammin Alcoa Landcare Education Centre?

The underlying theme of the education centre is to get people to think about agriculture, conservation and the environment as part of their everyday lives.

Visitors are asked to think about how conservation and farming practices fit together? What causes soil and water salinity, and how can we control it? How do we overcome soil erosion? How do we measure what’s happening to the level of the water-table, and how healthy are our rivers and creeks? What does the soil really look like below the surface?

Numerous activities are outlined in the extensive field study guides for teachers and primary and secondary school students. Many activities are based on science and ecology, others lend themselves to creativity: the colours and feel of the Western Australian landscape and bush - it’s not all dull green and prickly. Writers and artists are inspired by the countryside, so children have the chance to use the bush to widen their creative skills.

If a group wants to use the Tammin Alcoa Education Centre, contact the Shire Office, (096) 37 1101.

FAR LEFT: Granite outcrops are good water catchments. They are also havens for wildflowers and small animals in the rocky pools. Senior high school teachers (from left) Conchi Chamizo of City Beach, Margaret Sermon of Northam and Trevor Hall of Eastern Hills get a closer view of aquatic wildlife.