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Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

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Three hundred and fifty million years ago a vast tropical sea covered much of Australia's north-west. In the warm shallows surrounding what we now call the Kimberley grew an enormous barrier reef, probably 1,000 km long, and over 20 km wide.

At Geikie Gorge, Windjana Gorge, and Tunnel Creek National Parks, about 2,500 km north of Perth, the flood waters of three rivers have carved deeply into the Geikie and Napier ranges. Layers of fossils and the limestone strata of the ancient reef have been exposed in cross-section, opening a fascinating window on life in the Devonian period before the evolution of reptiles or mammals.

The Kimberley has a wet season and a dry. During the 'wet' the Fitzroy River at Geikie Gorge rises about 16.5 m, polishing smooth the walls of the Gorge, and flooding the national park with 7 m of water.

In the dry, between April and November, the river transforms itself into a quiet stream strung out beneath the towering cliffs of the Devonian reef. Clear hot days and cool nights make this the best time of year to journey through the Kimberley.

The Environment

The limestone ranges formed by the ancient barrier reef wind across the country between 50 and 100 m above the surrounding plains, in much the same way that the reef would have reared above the Devonian sea floor. From the air it is easy to imagine that the sea has just withdrawn, leaving the reefs uncovered.

Unlike modern reefs, corals in the Devonian world took a minor part in the construction of the limestone reef-platform. Calcareous algae, and a group of now extinct lime-secreting organisms, the stromatoporoids, built the bulk of the reef.

Ranging from atolls of a few hectares, to hundreds of square kilometres, the wave-resistant reef platforms grew close to sea level, rising 200 m or more above the sea floor.

As the ocean floor slowly subsided over the 50 million years of the Devonian period the reef-building organisms were able to keep pace, building up and up until in places the reef became over two kilometres thick.

Plant Life

The Kimberley is a dry country, covered in open savannah vegetation, but surrounding the rivers are dense fringes of riverine forest, supported by the year-round supply of water.

Trees in the gorges are mostly cadjeputs (tropical paperbarks), and river gums. Also common are native figs, and the freshwater mangrove, a small tree with pendulous sprays of small red flowers.

Wildlife

The Johnston crocodile, a freshwater species, lives in both Geikie and Windjana Gorge and can often be seen resting on sandbanks in the river. It is normally a fish eater, and is not usually dangerous to people.

Sawfish and stingrays, whose ancestors left the sea and journeyed 300 km up the Fitzroy River are also common in Geikie Gorge and have completely adapted to freshwater life.

Another fascinating fish is the archer fish, which shoots down insects from foliage above the river with a jet of water. They can often be seen in schools near the water's surface, and are easily identified by their silver colour, six or seven black marks on the upper side, and their tapered snout.

Most native mammals are small, nocturnal, and shy, but during the day or evening you may see agile (or sandy) wallabies, identifiable by the pale stripe on their flank. The more heavily built euro also lives in the area, and if you are very lucky you may spot one of the wary rock wallabies.

A prolific number of birds inhabit the gorges, and rangers have compiled a checklist of over 100 species for Geikie Gorge alone.



Geikie Gorge
Windjana Gorge
Tunnel Creek



Department of Conservation
and Land Management
50 Hayman Road, Como, W.A. 6152.
(09) 367 0333
1988

Regional Office:
Konkerberry Drive, Kununurra W.A. 6743 Ph: (091) 680200

C/- Post Office
Fitzroy Crossing W.A. 6765 Ph: (091) 915121

Further Information

National park rangers are always glad to help make your visit more enjoyable and informative. If you need help or have any questions do not hesitate to contact them.

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STAY ON THE ROAD: Follow signs in the park, and stay on the roads marked in this brochure. Normal road rules apply.

PROTECT ANIMALS AND PLANTS: No firearms or pets please.

STAY COOL: Don't light fires, except in fireplaces provided. Bring your own portable gas stove.

BE CAREFUL: Your enjoyment and safety in natural environments is our concern, but your responsibility.

BE CLEAN: Litter in bins, or better still, take it with you.

REMEMBER



Bushwalks

Geikie Gorge

Take a walk along west bank to the western wall of the gorge. The still waters of the Fitzroy River during the 'dry' mirror the galleried walls of the gorge and the brilliant colours of sunset and sunrise.

Windjana Gorge

A trail about 3.5 km long winds along the gorge from the camp site. This is the only way to see the gorge properly.

Tunnel Creek

Tunnel Creek has bored 750 m through the prehistoric reef, forming a tunnel between 3 m and 12 m high, and 15 m wide. Take a walk through the icy waters of Tunnel Creek and get a close-up of the fossil reef. You will need a torch.

THINGS TO SEE AND DO

Camping

Geikie and Windjana Gorge both have a camping and caravan area equipped with toilets, water and showers. The campsites are open between April and November each year. A small fee is payable per night.

Portable generators can be used in the marked area between 8.00 a.m. and 9.00 p.m.

Camping is not permitted at Tunnel Creek.

Swimming

This is an excellent way to cool off. Freshwater crocodiles do live in the gorge although they are not usually a danger to people. Parents should exercise caution with small children. At Geikie Gorge the best place to swim is at the junction of the Margaret and Fitzroy Rivers where a large sand bank usually develops. Please remember that the east bank is a sanctuary.

Boating

A tour boat travels Geikie Gorge twice daily, leaving at 9.00 a.m. and 2.30 p.m.

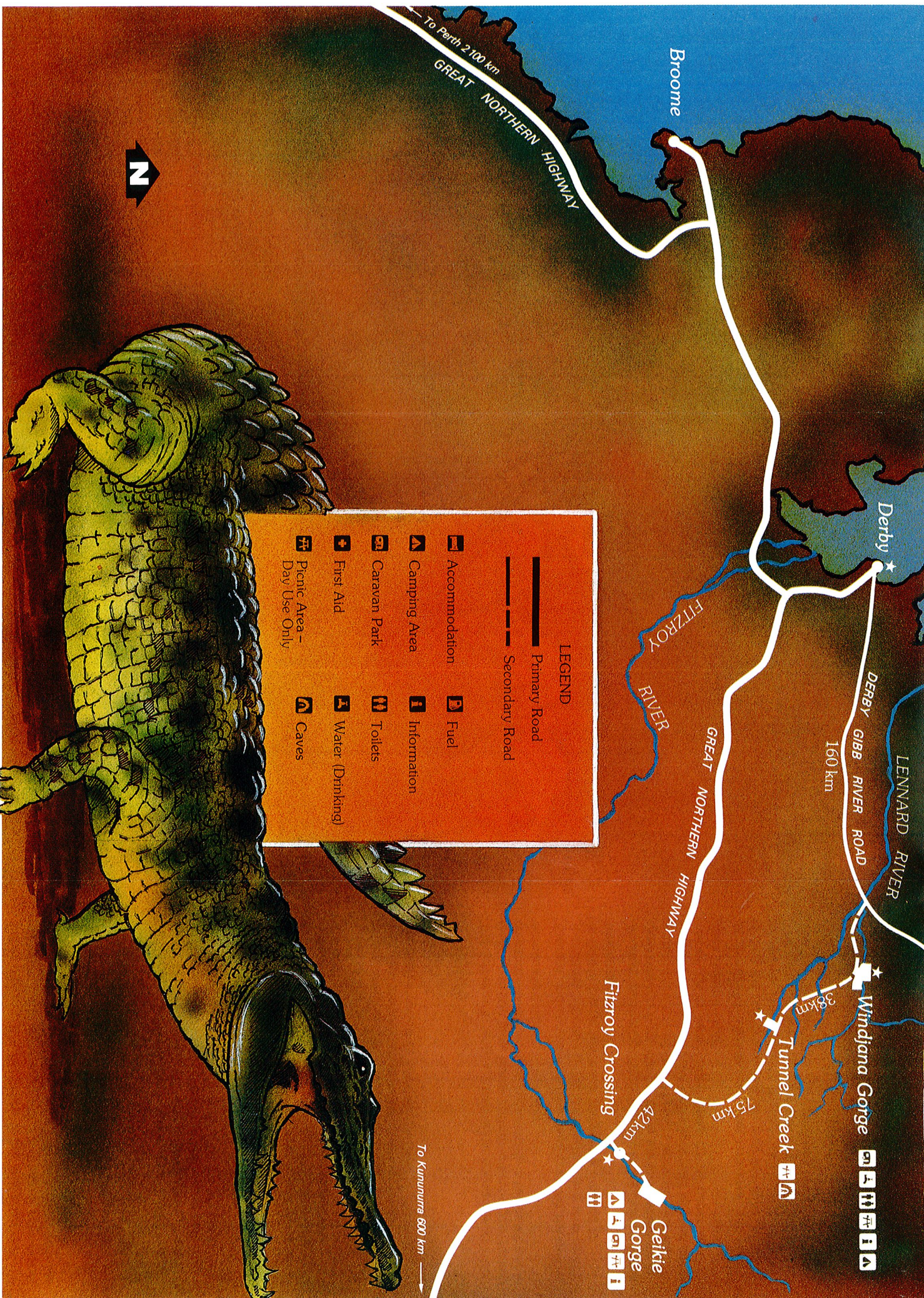
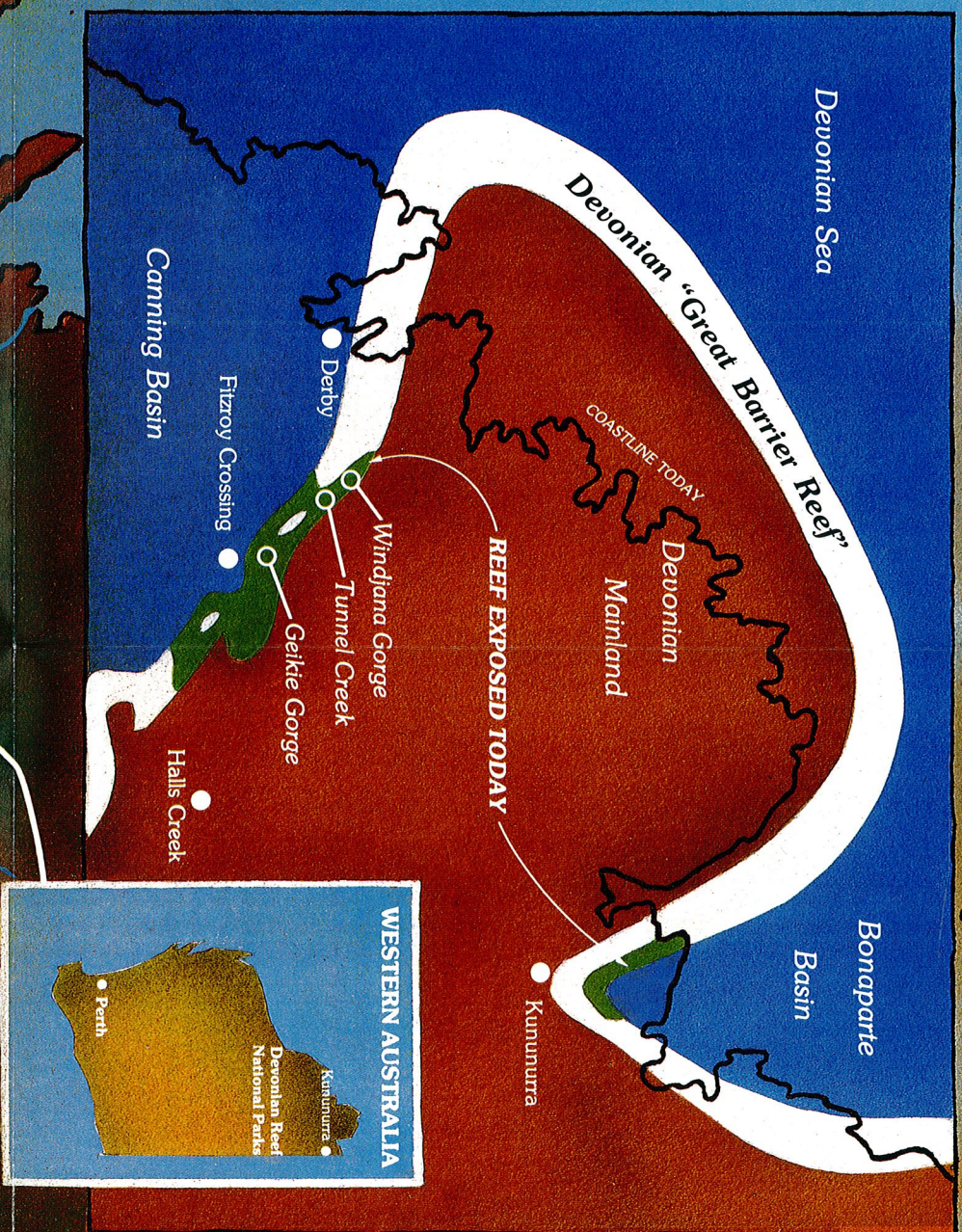
Tickets are available on site 15 minutes before departure.

Private Boats

A launch fee applies. There are restrictions on the use of private boats in the gorge. You should ask the ranger for advice before launching your boat.

The Sanctuary

Geikie Gorge is very special. We want you to enjoy the National Park: at the same time we want to preserve the wild beauty of the area. For this reason both banks of the river have been declared a sanctuary. This means that no-one may set foot within 200 m of either bank, except for the permitted area which runs along the west bank, from the southern boundary of the Park to the beginning of the west wall of the gorge.



LEGEND	
	Primary Road
	Secondary Road
	Accommodation
	Fuel
	Camping Area
	Information
	Caravan Park
	Toilets
	First Aid
	Water (Drinking)
	Picnic Area - Day Use Only
	Caves