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# Kennedy Range

Penny Hussey

Some 160km inland from Carnarvon lie the spectacular sandstone battlements of the Kennedy Range. This huge mesa, 100km long and 30km wide, is a remnant of an old erosion surface which slopes very gently to the west. The rocks are Permian and Tertiary sandstones and limestones, and in places contain many fossils, including ammonites and petrified wood. In places, a brightly coloured chert known locally as "mookaite" occurs, and this is highly prized by lapidary enthusiasts.

Erosion is cutting back into the Range, and on the eastern side a resistant sandstone layer has formed spectacular cliffs. A tourist road leads to a picnic site by these cliffs. The southern and eastern edges of the Range are dissected by a maze of steep-sided canyons. In the east these support permanent springs which create running streams of somewhat mineralised water that supports an abundance of wildlife.

The plateau which forms the top of the Range is an endless sea of red sandhills marching on and on, 10m high and 100m apart for the whole length of the Range. Protected on all sides by sheer cliffs and utterly waterless, this mini-desert makes an ideal ecological reserve. It teems with reptiles and small mammals and harbours unusual plants such as *Banksia ashbyi* and *Grevillea gordoniana* which, in season, break into spectacular flower. Only two roads, both now washed out, reach the top, one made by pastoralists, the other by oil drillers. No oil was found, and the station was abandoned.

In 1974 the Conservation Through Reserves Committee recommended that the Kennedy Range be created a National Park. The suggested area was the top of the Range, and included the springs and canyons on its edges. The EPA in 1975 endorsed this recommendation and requested that the Government purchase station leases to enable this Park to be created, or else excise the land concerned when the leases expire. In 1977, one lease, Binthalya, was purchased for the purpose of "National Park". For a while a Ranger

was stationed there, making an assessment of the Park and its needs.

Despite this, the National Park has still not been declared. WHY?

Firstly, those portions of Binthalya which had the potential to carry stock (even though they were severely overgrazed) were leased to the two neighbouring stations, Mardathuna and Mooka, to "increase their viability." In return the stations were to release to the proposed NP those portions of their leases which were ungrazable ie the top of the Range. Mooka has done this. Mardathuna has not. Why? The pastoralists also agreed to fence off the springs and pipe water into their paddocks so that grazing stock did not destroy the vegetation around the springs. This has not been done. Why?

Secondly, mining. WAPET explored for oil but found nothing. However, ESSO currently hold the oil tenements and are purportedly looking for oil shale. In 1980 the Mines Dept refused to allow the creation of the National Park because of ESSO's interest (isn't it strange how a Department can veto a Government decision?) and asked that a five-year moratorium be placed on the recommendation.

Five years are up. NOW, THIS YEAR, the Kennedy Range National Park should be proclaimed.

