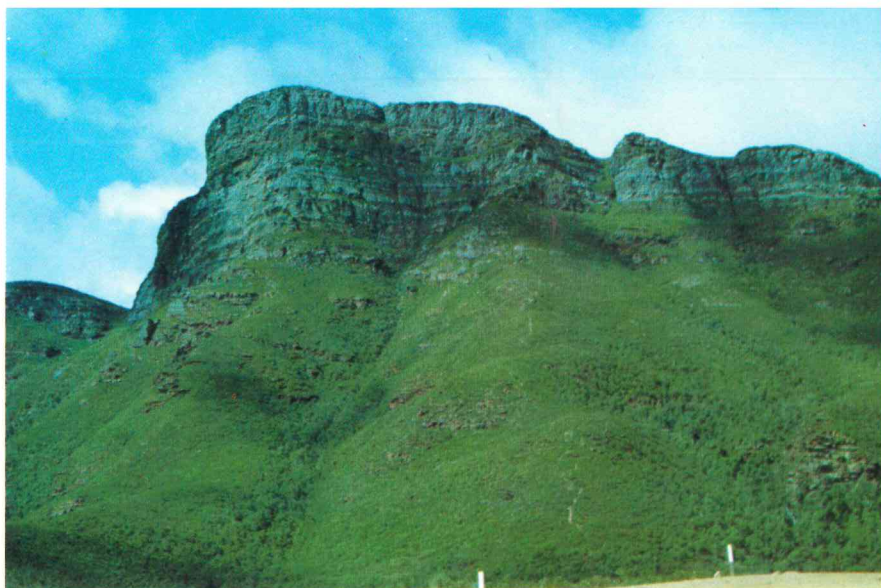


LIBRARY

Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

This PDF has been created for digital preservation. It may be used for research but is not suitable for other purposes. It may be superseded by a more current version or just be out-of-date and have no relevance to current situations.

NATIONAL PARKS IN W.A.



Bluff Knoll in Stirling Range National Park.

By courtesy of C. J. Jenkins

Although many people think that a national park is primarily a recreation and picnic area located in a rural or bush setting, this is very far from the truth, and in this article I want to explain what is meant by a national park and why these reserves are of such great importance.

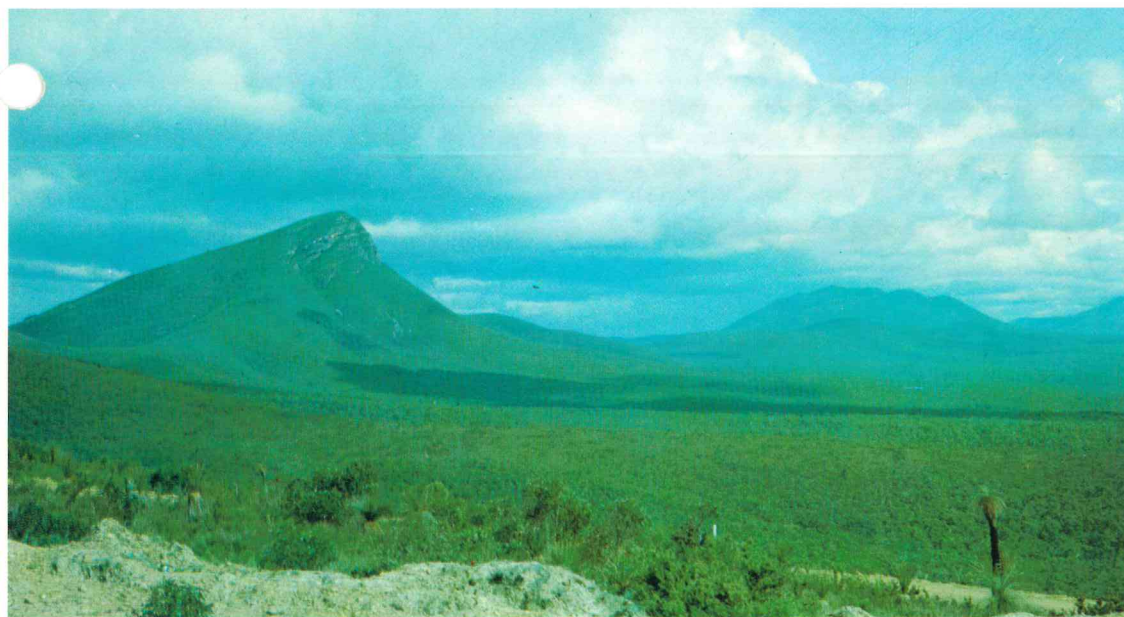
In August, 1976, a special Act of Parliament known as the National Parks Authority Act created a nine-member Authority to manage 'certain areas as National Parks and

Reserves for the conservation of natural environment . . . and the provision of access and facilities for public recreation . . . and other purposes'.

It is important to note that the first responsibility of the Authority is to protect the environment—that is, scenery and the flora and fauna—and the provision of recreation facilities comes later. Indeed, some types of recreation are quite unsuited to a national park and should not be allowed under any circumstances.

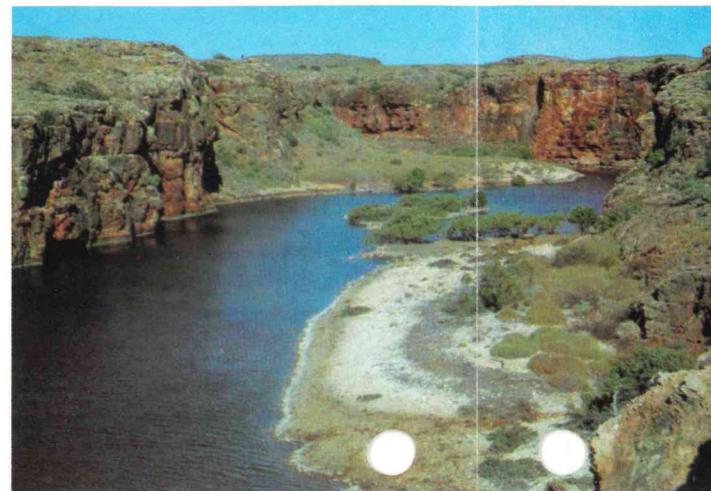
View south from Bluff Knoll.

By courtesy of C. J. Jenkins





Left: The Knoll,
Walpole-Nornalup
National Park.



Right: Yardie Creek
Gorge, Cape Range
National Park.

Photos by courtesy of
National Parks
Authority

For instance, the establishment of golf-courses and football-grounds in natural bush-land would require extensive clearing and certainly could not be regarded as protecting the environment. Also, the use of noisy trail-bikes and dune-buggies in national parks could be highly disturbing to other visitors as well as to native wildlife, and would certainly cause plant destruction and serious soil erosion.

Even on the beach itself vehicles can be a nuisance, despite the fact that they may not be destroying vegetation or causing erosion. The noise is very disturbing to people wishing to 'get away from it all', and also to birds such as dotterels and rock parrots, which often nest on or very near the beach, and to shoreline feeders such as gulls, terns, oyster-catchers and the plover-like waders which visit us every spring and summer from Russia and other countries in the northern hemisphere.

For these reasons, vehicle access to beaches should be controlled according to the particular requirements of the area. Horse riding and boating are borderline cases. In some parks horses could introduce harmful weeds or destroy vegetation, but in other areas they could be admitted along firebreaks, as well as on the normal roads and tracks. Powerboats are normally much too noisy for a national park, but sailing and rowing boats may have a place where their use would not encourage visitors

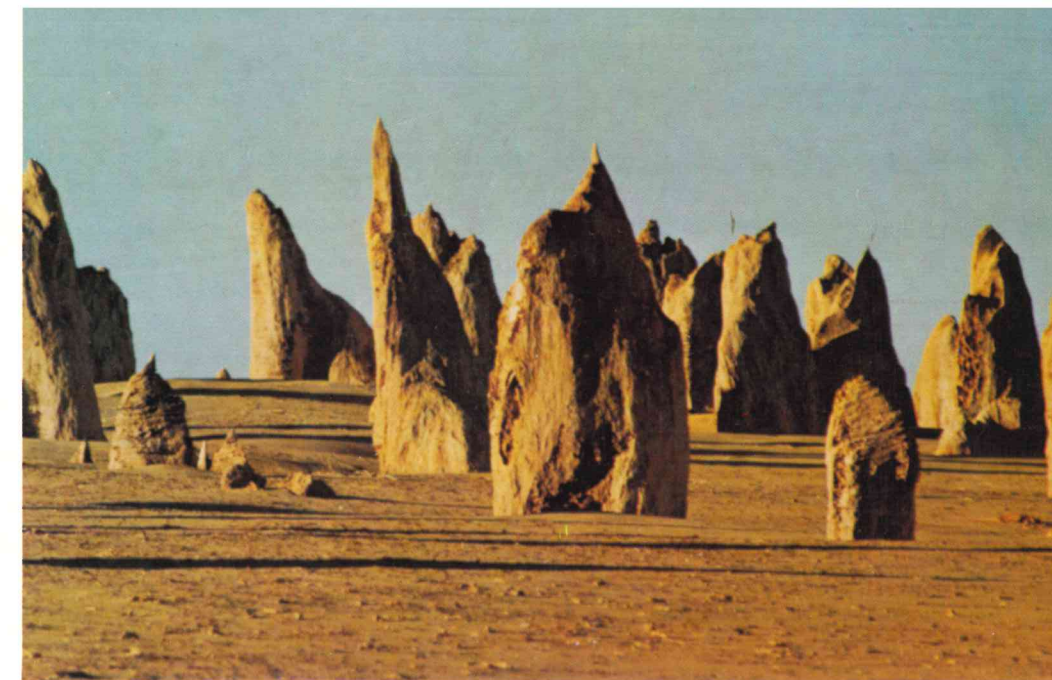
to trespass on wilderness areas, so necessary for the protection of some rare plants and animals.

On the other hand, bush-walking, bird-watching, photography and similar 'passive' forms of recreation are very appropriate for national parks, and if properly conducted should not harm either landscape or the flora and fauna.

One of the most difficult problems in national parks management is to persuade park users that short-term exploitation of the park must not be permitted at the expense of its long-term preservation. For instance, when a new coastal reserve is declared a national park and traffic is directed along authorized roads to defined parking areas, visitors, and particularly local residents, are apt to complain at having to walk longer distances or at being excluded from their favourite fishing or picnic areas.

At first thought these restrictions may seem unreasonable, and yet if the national parks are to be protected properly such controls are absolutely necessary.

It should be remembered that the coming of the aeroplane, the four-wheel-drive vehicle and, more recently, the trail-bike has completely destroyed the concept of the inaccessible outback. Even the beauties of Ayers Rock in central Australia have been threatened

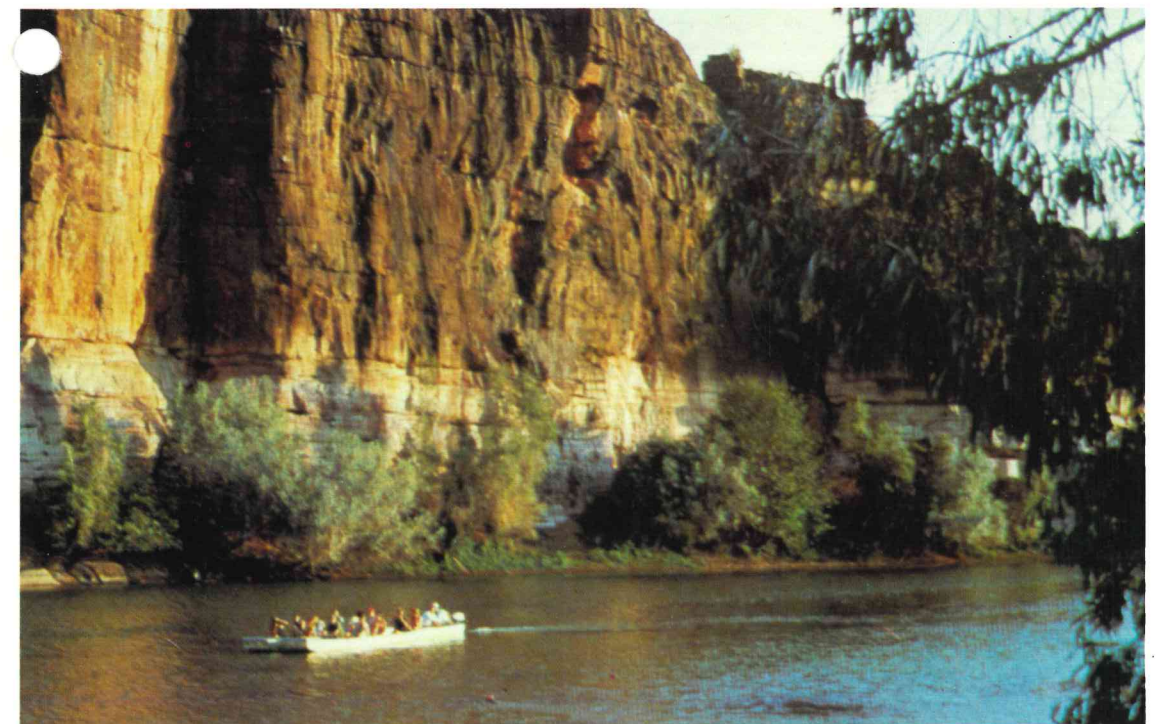


Above: The Pinnacles,
Nambung National Park.
By courtesy of Department of
Tourism

Right: Murchison Gorge,
Kalbarri National Park.
By courtesy of National Parks
Authority



Below: On the river, Geikie
Gorge National Park.
By courtesy of Department of
Tourism



by too many visitors. The more popular a park becomes, the more likely it is to lose many of its beauties and natural attractions.

A good example of this is Yanchep National Park, with its caves, lakes, wildflowers and giant tuart trees. Ten years ago approximately 30 000 cars visited the park annually, but now the number has reached 100 000 and must continue to grow as housing and other developments increase in the region.

In a busy week-end the developed areas of the park are severely overcrowded and the bush around it can be damaged by trampling feet, disfigured by litter and drink cans, or partially destroyed by fires which have been lit away from the prepared barbecue sites.

The duties of rangers in national parks are, of course, to protect the area, particularly from bush fires and vandals, but equally important are relations with the public. The ranger should not be seen as a policeman, but rather as a friend who is knowledgeable about the park and its wildlife and is anxious that all visitors should enjoy the many attractions of the area to the full. This can be done best by studying any leaflets which the ranger may have available and by complying with park notices, for, although these may appear to be over-restrictive at times, they have been prepared to help visitors and to ensure long-term protection for the park's scenery and wildlife.

At present the National Parks Authority controls some seventy national parks and reserves covering approximately four million hectares. These extend from the Drysdale River National Park in the north Kimberley to the Cape Arid National Park on the south coast. They vary in size from the Rudall River National Park of more than one and a half

million hectares on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert to the Old Mill Reserve of less than a quarter of a hectare at South Perth. It is likely that many more areas will be declared national parks in the near future as a result of recommendations made by the Conservation Through Reserves Committee (C.T.R.C.) in its 1974 report to the Environmental Protection Authority (E.P.A.).

This committee selected a system of reserves which 'if suitably managed will conserve examples of the principal environmental and scenic variety in Western Australia'.

Fortunately, the State Government has already approved many of these recommendations and the reserves have been allocated to either the Wildlife Authority (where flora and fauna conservation is of overwhelming importance) or the National Parks Authority (where public access and tourism can be permitted without serious effects upon the environment).

The names mentioned indicate the wide distribution of our national parks, the remoteness of many of them, and the difficulty of arranging for their correct management.

So far, it has not been possible to station rangers at all our parks, but mobile rangers, provided with four-wheel drive vehicles, caravans and two-way radios, maintain a constant patrol and help to protect even the most distant reserves until money and staff are available to allow for full-time supervision.

In the meantime it is important that the real purpose of a national park should be properly understood, not only by travellers and tourists but also by every member of the public, so that the misuse of the parks will be reduced and their future security will be assured.

*Mr C. F. H. Jenkins, who wrote this article,
is the President of the National Parks Authority
of Western Australia.*