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Below Cape Le Grand. Photo – Tourism WA

Wild coastal scenery, rugged granite peaks, and sweeping heathlands characterise the national parks of the Esperance area.

Cape Le Grand National Park, 50 kilometres east of Esperance by sealed road, features attractive bays with wide sandy beaches set between rocky headlands. Inland, the park protects an undulating heath-covered sandplain interspersed with swamps and freshwater pools. In the south-west corner of the park, massive rock outcrops of granite and gneiss form an impressive chain of peaks including Mt Le Grand (345 metres), Frenchman Peak (262 metres) and Mississippi Hill (180 metres).

Stokes National Park, 80 kilometres west of Esperance, encompasses Stokes Inlet and features long beaches and rocky headlands backed by sand dunes and low hills. The inlet and its associated lakes support a rich variety of wildlife and are an important park of this national park.

One hundred kilometres inland from Stokes is Peak Charles National Park. This ancient granite peak and its companion, Peak Eleanor, give sweeping views over the dry sandplain heaths and salt lake systems of the surrounding country. Peak Charles lies within the Great Western Woodlands and is one of the key gateways to this area. There are limited visitor facilities in this wild area, so go prepared and carry your own water.

Warm summers from December to March are followed by cool winters. Most rain falls during the winter months between April and October.

National parks, state forests, nature reserves and wildlife throughout the state are managed for the people of Western Australia by the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). While you're in the Esperance area drop into our office for more information on WA's natural environment.

Parks of Esperance

The national parks and nature reserves of the Esperance region form a network of conservation areas that protect a wide variety of native plant communities and landscapes. At Cape Le Grand, the peaks of the park's south-west corner are formed from massive outcrops of Precambrian granite and gneiss, exposed by erosion and movements in the Earth's crust during the past 600 million years.

During the Eocene period, some 40 million years ago, sea levels were at least 300 metres above their present level and these peaks would have been largely submerged. The caves and tunnels found in the peaks are thought to have been either formed or enlarged by wave action and underwater currents.

The sandplains which cover much of the park support a great variety of plant and animal life. Flowers are those typical of the south-west. In areas of deep sand, dense thickets of *Banksia speciosa* thrive, growing to three or four metres tall. On gravel outcrops and in areas where the soil is shallow, *Banksia pulchella* may be found. When in flower, the banksias are a source of nectar and insects for the tiny honey possum, while after dark the quenda, or southern brown bandicoot, forages in the understorey for grubs and worms.

The environment

Above Lucky Bay, Cape Le Grand National Park. Photo – Tourism WA



Stokes National Park protects the wildlife habitats of Stokes Inlet and the surrounding heathland and lake systems. Yate, swamp yate, and paperbark form dense low forests near the wetlands, which in turn support a great variety of waterbirds. Keep a wary eye open for tiger snakes when walking in the wetlands. In autumn look out for the magnificent yellow flowers of the bell-fruited mallee, *Eucalyptus prelessiana*, which only grows to about one metre. Peak Charles National Park protects a pristine area of dry woodlands, sandplain heaths and salt lake vegetation, in the middle of which rise Peak Charles (651 metres) and Peak Eleanor (501 metres).

The Peak Charles walk leads from the car park to a point on the south-east ridge, from which extensive views of Peak Eleanor are obtained. Beyond here, the walk to the summit is only suitable for experienced bushwalkers or rock climbers, as it involves exposed rock scrambling.

Like the peaks at Cape Le Grand, both peaks were islands during the late Eocene, and wave-cut platforms can be seen on their upper slopes.



Above Shoal Cape in Stokes National Park. Photo – Klaus Tiedemann/DEC



Above Moir Homestead, Stokes National Park. Photo – Tourism WA

Stokes National Park

Stokes Inlet Trail – Allow 1.5 hours for this 3.8-kilometre easy walk.

The trail has on-site plaques describing changes which have occurred to the inlet environment. The path gives magnificent views of the inlet and surrounds.

Cape Le Grand

Frenchman Peak – 3 kilometres return

A track leads from the car park, up the gentle east slope of the peak to the summit, which features great views over the park. Allow 1.5 hours hard walking.

Coastal Track

– 15 kilometres one way

The track runs from Le Grand Beach via Hellfire Bay to Rossiter Bay, and features excellent coastal views. Always carry drinking water with you.

The track falls into shorter sections. All times are one way:

- Le Grand Beach – Hellfire Bay: allow three hours of hard walking
- Hellfire Bay – Thistle Cove: allow two hours of hard walking
- Heritage Trail – Thistle Cove: allow 45 minutes medium walking
- Lucky Bay – Rossiter Bay: allow 2.5 hours of medium walking.

More information

DEC officers are always glad to help. Don't hesitate to contact them if you need information or assistance.

Visitor fees apply to Cape Le Grand and Stokes national parks. Fees are used to improve facilities and help offset costs.

Cape Le Grand National Park
 PO Box 706, Esperance WA 6450
 Phone (08) 9075 9072
 Fax (08) 9075 9073
 A/H (08) 9075 9027

Stokes National Park
 RMB 7138, Esperance WA 6450
 Phone/fax (08) 9076 8541

Peak Charles National Park
 92 Dempster St, Esperance WA 6450
 Phone (08) 9083 2100

Esperance District Office
 92 Dempster St, Esperance WA 6450
 Phone (08) 9083 2100
 Fax (08) 9071 3657

South Coast Regional Office
 120 Albany Highway, Albany WA 6330
 Phone (08) 9842 4500
 Fax (08) 9841 3329

State Operations Headquarters
 17 Dick Perry Avenue, Kensington WA 6151
 Phone (08) 9334 0333

www.dec.wa.gov.au

Below Granite landscape taken from Frenchman Peak. Photo – Klaus Tiedemann/DEC



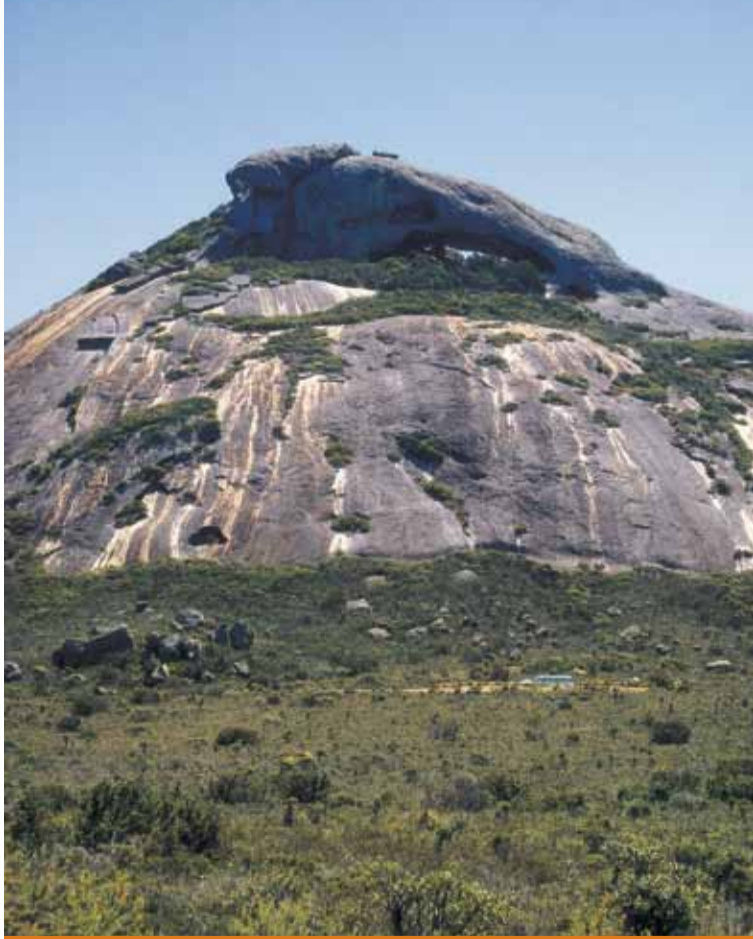
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Front cover Frenchman Peak, Cape Le Grand National Park. Photo – Tourism WA

Esperance national parks

Peak Charles – Cape Le Grand – Stokes



Information and recreation guide



Department of Environment and Conservation



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Things to see and do

Facilities such as toilets, gas barbecues, tables and rubbish bins are provided at places shown on the maps. Information shelters on site will tell you more about these national parks.

Camping

Two camping grounds are situated in Cape Le Grand National Park; one at Lucky Bay and the other at Le Grand Beach (see map). Facilities include flushing toilets, showers and campers' kitchens.

Camping fees apply to both Cape Le Grand and Stokes national parks. Wood fires are not permitted. Free gas barbecues are provided.

At Stokes National Park the main camp site is located on the shores of the inlet. Please be sure to bring sufficient fresh water as there are no available water supplies in the park. Basic bush toilets are provided.

Peak Charles National Park has an area designated for camping, but facilities are very basic. There is no fresh water so, if you intend to visit, make sure you are totally self-sufficient.

Boating

In Cape Le Grand National Park, boats are best launched at Lucky Bay. Small boats can also be launched from Cape Le Grand Beach. Launching at Rossiter Bay is not recommended. These beaches are notoriously treacherous for vehicles and it is easy to become bogged in the most innocent-looking wet or dry sand. Always check beach surface conditions and tides.

Stokes Inlet is also popular for boating and canoeing, and it is possible to launch small boats. However, the capacity of the inlet for sailing is limited. Although the area of water looks large there are extensive areas of shallows and rocks.

Below Peak Charles. Photo - DEC



Above Looking west over Lucky Bay. Photo - Klaus Tiedemann/DEC

Normal fisheries regulations apply in national parks. Fishing is popular at both Cape Le Grand and Stokes national parks. Many species can be caught, including Australian salmon, whiting and black bream.

Fish safe, be coast safe. Your safety is your responsibility.

Park passes

Visitor fees apply in Cape Le Grand and Stokes national parks. Passes can be obtained at the park or from the DEC District Office.

Bushwalks

Footpaths have been established at national parks to help you explore the environment.

Below Path to Whistling Rock, Cape Le Grand National Park. Photo - Tourism WA



Remember

Be careful

Stay on paths and help prevent erosion. Your safety in natural areas is our concern, but your responsibility.

Be clean

Put your litter in bins or, better still, take it with you.

Be cool

Fires are only permitted at Peak Charles during the cooler months. Firewood is not to be sourced from within the national park.

Protect animals and plants

Firearms and pets are not permitted within these national parks.

Stay on the road

Follow signs and stay on roads marked in this brochure. Normal road rules apply.



Above Coastal walking trail, Cape Le Grand National Park. Photo - Tourism WA

Dieback - Help stop the rot

Dieback is a plant disease caused by a waterborne mould called *Phytophthora cinnamomi*. The fungus is microscopic and lives in the soil. Plants die when the fungus attacks their roots, because the roots rot and cannot take up water or nutrients.

Vehicles may spread this pathogen, so it is essential to keep to formed roads and follow road signs in conservation reserves. By keeping out of closed areas you will help preserve the beauty of these magnificent national parks.

Bushwalkers can help by cleaning mud and soil from their boots before entering a park or reserve.

