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Coalseam Conservation Park



Visitor guide



Department of **Biodiversity,**
Conservation and Attractions



**PARKS AND
WILDLIFE**
SERVICE

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Front cover Riverbend.

Above Coal seams are evident at sites along the banks of the Irwin River.

Coalseam Conservation Park

Coalseam Conservation Park encompasses an area of 754 hectares in size and is renowned for its spectacular spring wildflower displays. It is an important refuge for the Eucalypt Woodlands of the Western Australian Wheatbelt threatened ecological community.

Geology

Where does the name Coalseam come from?

Coalseam Conservation Park is one of the few areas where coal can be seen at the Earth's surface. It is also the site of the first coal mining in Western Australia. The Irwin River has cut through the local rock displaying a striking cross-section of sedimentary layers, one of which is coal. Other layers of rock including siltstone and sandstone are exposed along cliff faces beside the river and represent hundreds of millions of years of the Earth's history.

An ancient landmass

The landscape of Coalseam Conservation Park formed when Australia was part of the supercontinent Gondwana. During this time the climate was vastly different from today with huge glaciers covering the land. Glaciers crushing the underlying rock created sediments that form much of the rock you see in the park today. Around 265 million years ago, swamps and peat lands growing on these sediments created the organic material that was to become coal deposits.

Visit the park's Riverbend site for the full story of the park's amazing geological history and take a look at coal still lining the creek adjacent to Miners Campground today.



Above left Augustus Gregory.

Above right Johnson shaft viewing platform along the Miners Walk Trail.

Aboriginal history

The area holds significance and strong traditional value for several local Indigenous groups. A variety of plants and animals found in the park are important for food and medicinal purposes. For those with a keen eye, artefacts such as stone flakes, scar trees and grinding stones may be seen. Please help protect the cultural history of the park by leaving these items as you find them.

European history

In 1839, a financially ailing Swan River Colony began the search for coal to support industrial development. On a survey expedition in 1846, the Gregory brothers Augustus, Frank and Henry discovered Western Australia's first coal in seams along the banks of the Irwin River. This subsequently resulted in the area being declared a reserve for mining purposes. The coal however, was of poor quality and deposited in such narrow seams that mining was untenable. One remaining mine shaft can still be seen from a viewing platform across the river from Miners Campground.

The Gregorys' exploration of the area made way for the coming of pastoralists and farmers, who developed the farming properties that now surround the park and brought permanent change to the lives of the local Aboriginal people.

The park's rugged terrain, being unsuitable for sheep and wheat, made it a vital refuge for native plants and animals. In time, the area's natural heritage values were recognised and in 1978, the park was vested in the Shire of Mingenew for the "preservation of natural features" before finally becoming a Conservation Park in 1994.



Above Coalseam comes alive in spring with an explosion of wildflowers.

Flora

Coalseam Conservation Park is among the most floristically spectacular areas in the northern Wheatbelt region of Western Australia. On the plateau, a thin sandplain covers the hard, iron-rich laterite capping. These sandy, dry soils are low in nutrients and support a variety of shrubs including the needle tree (*Hakea preissii*), kurara (*Acacia tetragonophylla*), shrubby riceflower (*Pimelea microcephala*) and hopbush (*Dodonaea inequifolia*). On the slopes and valley floor, reddish loams have formed from silt and sand washed down from the slopes and from the upper reaches of the river. These soils are relatively rich in nutrients and support a scattering of York gum trees (*Eucalyptus loxophleba*) with their copper coloured bark over a mostly wattle-dominated scrub that includes jam (*Acacia acuminata*) and orange wattle (*Acacia saligna*). Water in the river bed supports the much taller trees of river gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and swamp sheoak (*Casuarina obesa*). Look for mistletoe bushes that grow on wattles. These parasitic plants, including the pincushion mistletoe (*Amyema fitzgeraldii*), produce berries that are good food for the mistletoe bird (*Dicaeum hirundinaceum*).

A carpet of everlastings transform the park in spring showcasing WA's high diversity of the daisy family (*Asteraceae*) at its best. Named for their papery petals, each flowerhead is made up of hundreds of individual flowers to give the appearance of a single flower. Everlasting flowers close at dusk and open again at dawn. They avoid the harsh summer conditions by growing only in winter. Before dying in late spring, they produce abundant seed that germinates with the following year's winter rain.



Coalseam wildflower guide



Everlastings



Pompom head

Cephalipterum drummondii

Forms carpets of pompom-like yellow (and occasionally white) flowers.



Schoenia

Schoenia cassiniana

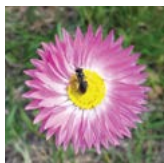
A common pink wildflower in the region.



Sticky everlasting

Lawrencella davenportii

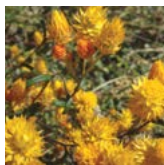
This common pink to white annual has its leaves clustered at the base of the stem.



Pink everlasting

Rhodanthe chlorocephala (subsp. *rosea*)

Look for native bees and other insects that seek shelter in the flowers as they close up for the night.



Orange immortelle

Waitzia acuminata

A distinctive late season yellow/orange annual flower.



Herbs



Fringed lily

Thysanotus manglesianus

This twining plant produces delicate purple flowers during spring.



Blue heronsbill

Erodium cygnorum

The small blue or purple flowers of this plant are thinly scattered throughout the park.



Bright podolepis

Podolepis aristata (subsp. *aristata*)

The tuber of this plant was baked in hot ashes and eaten by Aboriginal people.



Myriocephalus guerinae

Bright yellow annual, usually less than 40cm tall.



Parakeelya

Calandrinia polyandra

This springtime annual stores moisture in its leaves making it a tasty morsel for wildlife.



Weeds



Paterson's curse

Echium plantagineum

Common in disturbed areas in the park. Control measures are in place to manage this weed.



Cape weed

Arctotheca calendula

Widespread and common, this weed originally came from Southern Africa.



Fees

There are no entry fees for the park; however, camping fees apply to assist with management of the park and to help improve visitor facilities. Fees are collected by campground hosts.

Access

Coalseam Conservation Park is located 115km inland from Geraldton, approximately 30km north-east of Mingenew or 60km south of Mullewa. The park has year round access for all vehicles via well-formed gravel roads. However, during periods of heavy rain, the Irwin River may flood and be impassable until the water level drops. Check with the Shire of Mingenew on the road condition following significant rainfall. Please take notice of water depths before crossing and drive within your capability. Due to steep slopes and narrow roads, caravans are prohibited at Irwin Lookout or the Fossil site. Please leave your caravan at Miners or Breakaway.

Camping

The park's main campground is at Miners, where there are unpowered sites suitable for caravans, note the ground is hard and driving tent pegs is difficult. Picnic tables and toilets are also provided. Generator use is only permitted between 9am and 11am and between 4pm and 6pm. When the campground is full, overflow camping is permitted at the Breakaway site. All other sites are open for day use only. Camping is permitted for a maximum of three consecutive nights during the peak season (August to October) allowing everyone the opportunity to enjoy the park's wildflowers. Volunteer campground hosts are located at Miners campground at this time.

Things to do

Johnson Shaft Viewing Platform

Take the Miners Walk Trail (700m return) from the Miners picnic area across the creekline to view the disused Johnson coal shaft. Look out for coal visible as black bands in the banks of the watercourse as you cross.



Plateau Loop Trail

Take the 3.2km walk trail through the York gum woodland to enjoy sweeping valley views of the wildflowers from the plateau ridge. Allow 2 hours.



Riverbend

Close to the usually dry Irwin River, this recreation area has picnic tables, barbecues, toilets and an information shelter with signs covering the area's geology, flora and fauna. Riverbend gets its name from a section of the Irwin River that has carved a striking cliff face into the Victoria Plateau.

A cross-section of the underlying rock layers is exposed, offering an insight into the interesting geology of the park. The layers of rock span five evolutionary periods and provide valuable visual evidence of how the local landscape was formed.

Irwin Lookout

A 560m loop walk leads from the car park to lookouts along a cliff edge above the Irwin River where you will enjoy dramatic views of the valley below. Signs explain the geology of the area. Keep an eye out for soaring peregrine falcons and wedge-tailed eagles.



Fossil

The Fossil recreation area is situated on the banks of the Irwin River. Admire the view as you walk along the river where you may find marine fossils in the riverbank, exposed over time by erosion. You will have to look carefully though as the fossils are generally very small. Exposed coal seams can also be seen in the cliffs along the river if you head north from this site.



Above left Galah. *Photo – Mic Payne.*

Above right Mistletoe bird. *Photo – Mike Clarke.*

Fauna

A range of birds can easily be observed at Coalseam Conservation Park. Look for both the singing and the spiny-cheeked honeyeaters in areas where there are flowering trees and shrubs. Wedge-tailed eagles soar overhead and peregrine falcons can be seen along the cliff face at the Irwin Lookout. Galahs nest in tree hollows near Miners Campground and red-capped robins can be seen flitting around at ground level. Port Lincoln parrots are common in the park as are nankeen kestrels, black-faced woodswallows and cuckoo-shrikes, as well as crested and common bronzewing pigeons.

Much of Coalseam's animal life can be challenging to observe as mammals are mostly nocturnal and many reptiles can be very cryptic. With patience and a sharp eye, you may spot mammals such as the echidna, euro and red kangaroo. Reptiles such as the blue tongue and bobtail skink, Gould's sand goanna, fence skink and western netted dragon may be seen as well as mulga and gwardar snakes.

Look carefully and quietly to discover some of the animals within the park. Please do not disturb them or damage their habitat.

Caring for the park

- **Be kind** – it is an offence to disturb or remove cultural artefacts, animals, plants, fossils or rocks. Leave them as you find them for others to enjoy. No firearms or pets are permitted in the park.
- **Be responsible** – use the gas barbecues provided at Riverbend or use your own gas stove. Fires are not permitted within the park. Dead wood is habitat for wildlife not fuel for fires.
- **Be clean** – take your rubbish out of the park when you leave.

Stay safe

- Always carry ample drinking water – three to four litres of water per person per day – when walking. To avoid dehydration, drink small amounts regularly.
- **Stay on track** – follow the signs and stay on marked trails at all times.
- Visit emergency.wa.gov.au for bushfire and smoke alert information.
- Visit alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au for park, road and site closures



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could save
your life**



emergencyapp.triplezero.gov.au

Download the free Emergency+ app before your visit. Use the app in an emergency to call for assistance. If there is no mobile phone coverage you **WILL NOT** be able to call **000** but the app will provide you with your GPS location.



Above Blue tongue lizards are a common reptile in the park.
Photo – Mic Payne.

More information

Parks and Wildlife Service – Midwest Region Office

1st Floor, The Foreshore Centre

201 Foreshore Drive, Geraldton WA 6530

Ph. (08) 9964 0901

dbca.wa.gov.au.

Check for alerts and updates directly related to parks and major trails at alerts.dbca.wa.gov.au and for all emergency information in Western Australia at emergency.wa.gov.au.

Find more park visitor information, book campsites and share your experiences at exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au.

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