

THE DEVONIAN REEF

a photo essay by Cliff Winfield



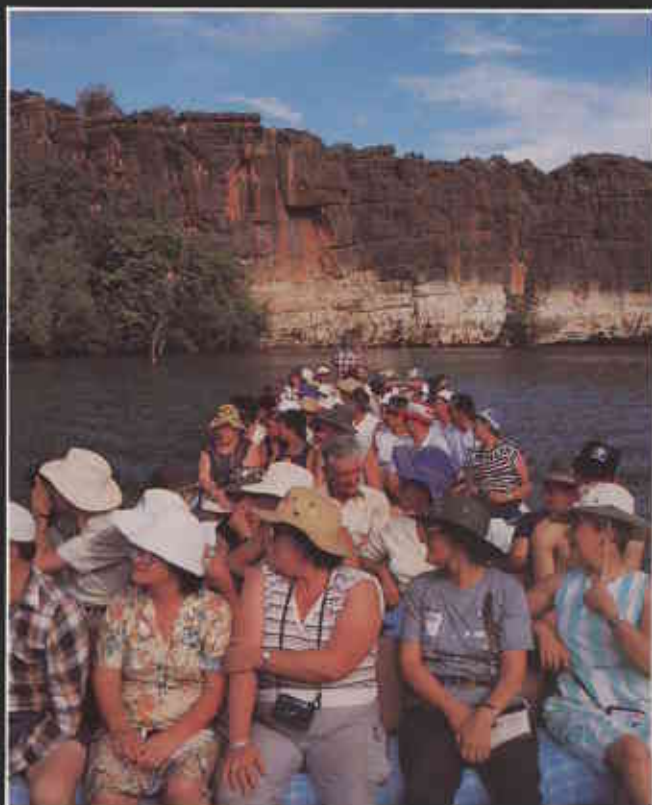
The gorges of the Devonian Reef offer us a grandstand view of nature past and present. An aquatic tourist coach (bottom right) plies the mirror-like waters of Geikie Gorge (overleaf), watched by Sulphur-crested Cockatoos (right) and Johnstone's crocodiles (below). Pandanus palms (above) are common throughout the gorges.

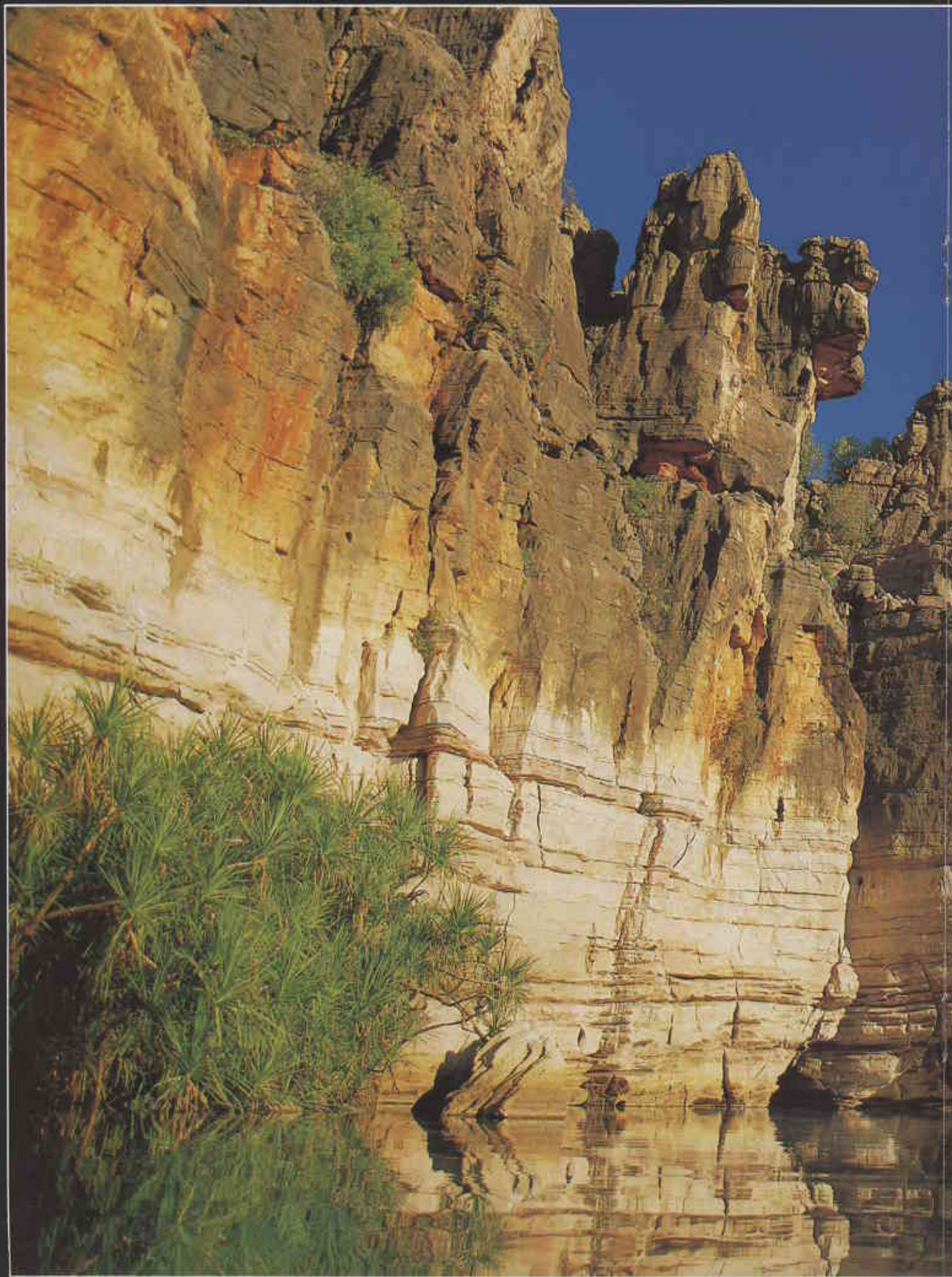


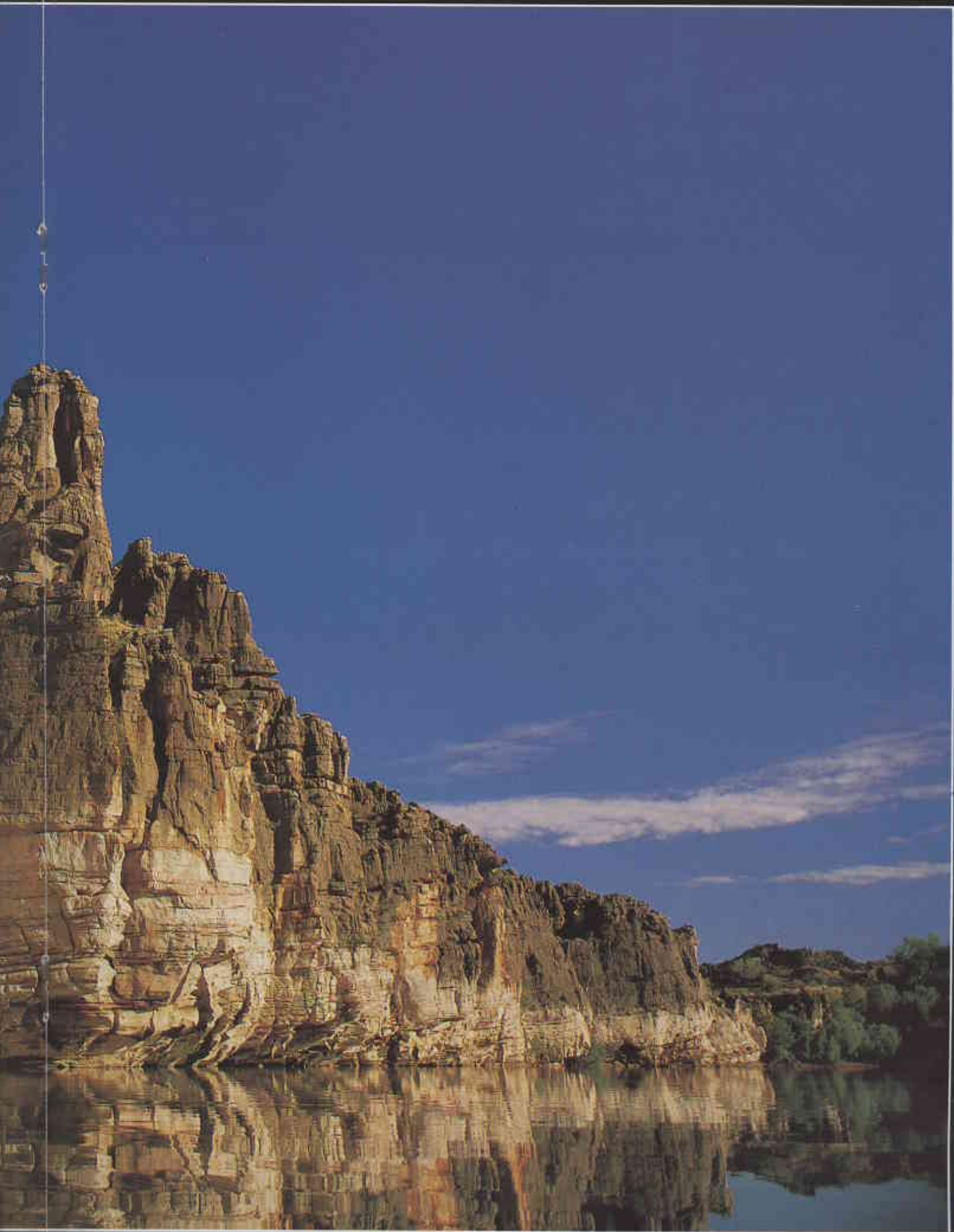
The earth is believed to have formed around 4500 million years ago. Since that time the surface has undergone some remarkable transformations. Geologists are able to plot the geological history of the planet by studying the formation and composition of landforms. And by studying fossils embedded in the layers of the earth's surface, paleontologists can build a picture of what life on earth was like during a particular geological period. Part of an era, between 395 and 345 million years ago, is known as the Devonian Period. At this time what is now known as the Canning Basin was covered by a vast tropical sea which shored onto the King Leopold Ranges and the Kimberley Plateau — at the time the Devonian mainland. Along the shore stromatoporoids, extinct organisms which resembled corals, grew and formed a massive barrier reef, possibly 1000 km long, up to 20 km wide and 2000 m thick. In the time since the formation of the reef, the sea has retreated and the old sea-bed has been covered by silt plains eroded from the mountain valleys. However, the remnants of the reef still protrude 50 to 100 m above the plain in a series of limestone ranges stretching 300 km across the Kimberley north-west from Fitzroy Crossing. Major rivers have intersected the ranges and exposed the layers of fossils

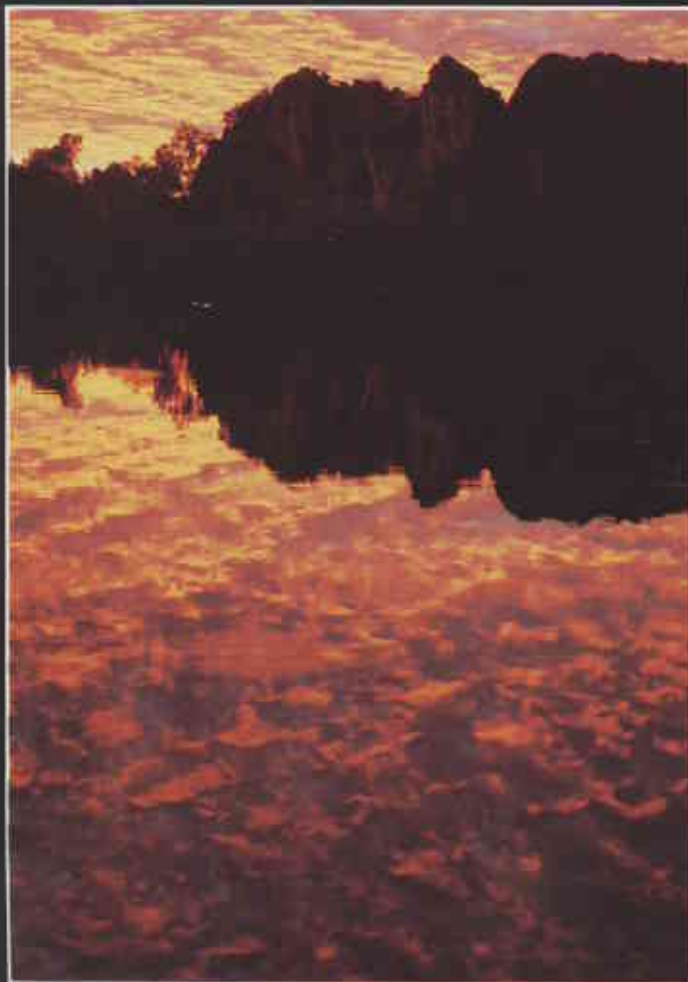


in cross-section, creating an amazing window on the past. To complement the scientific value, the gorges formed by the rivers have great scenic value, the gorges formed by the rivers have great scenic appeal. Three areas: Geikie Gorge, Tunnel Creek and Windjana Gorge are reserved as national Parks Devonian Reef.

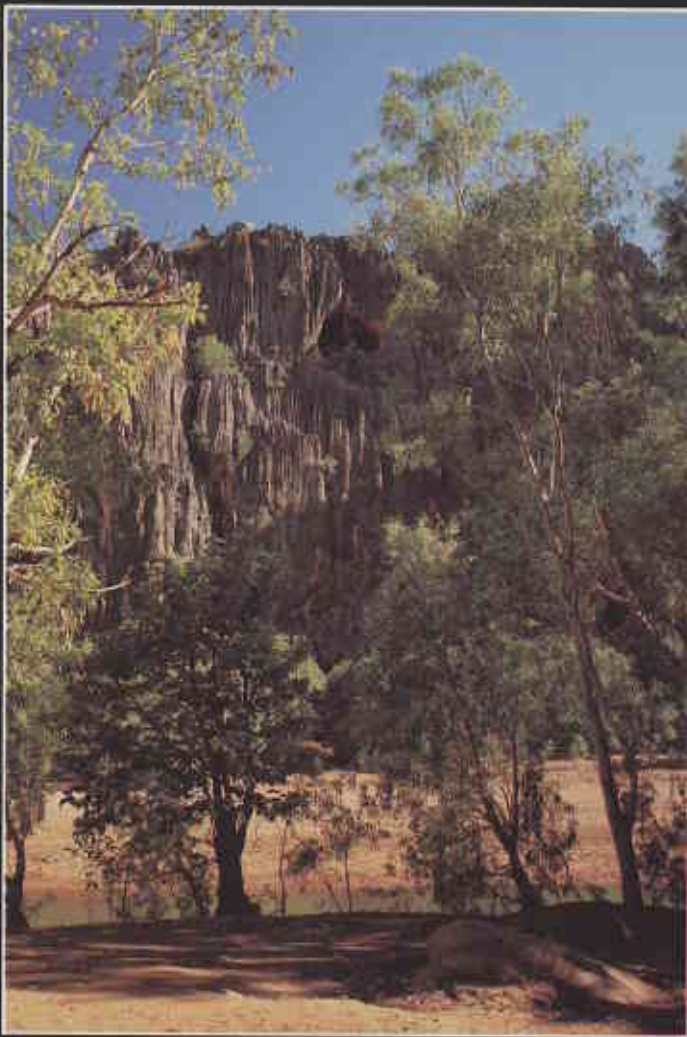




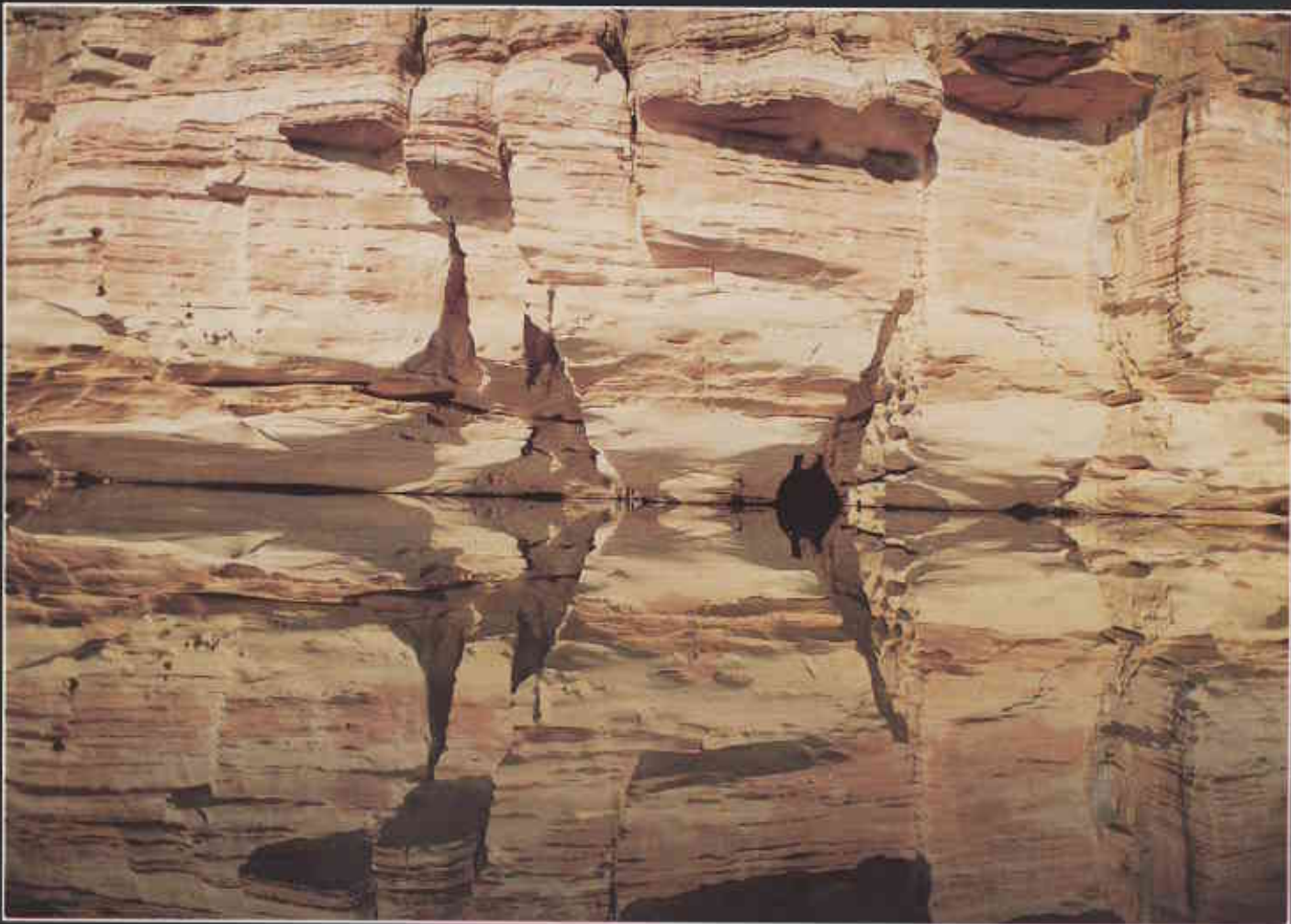




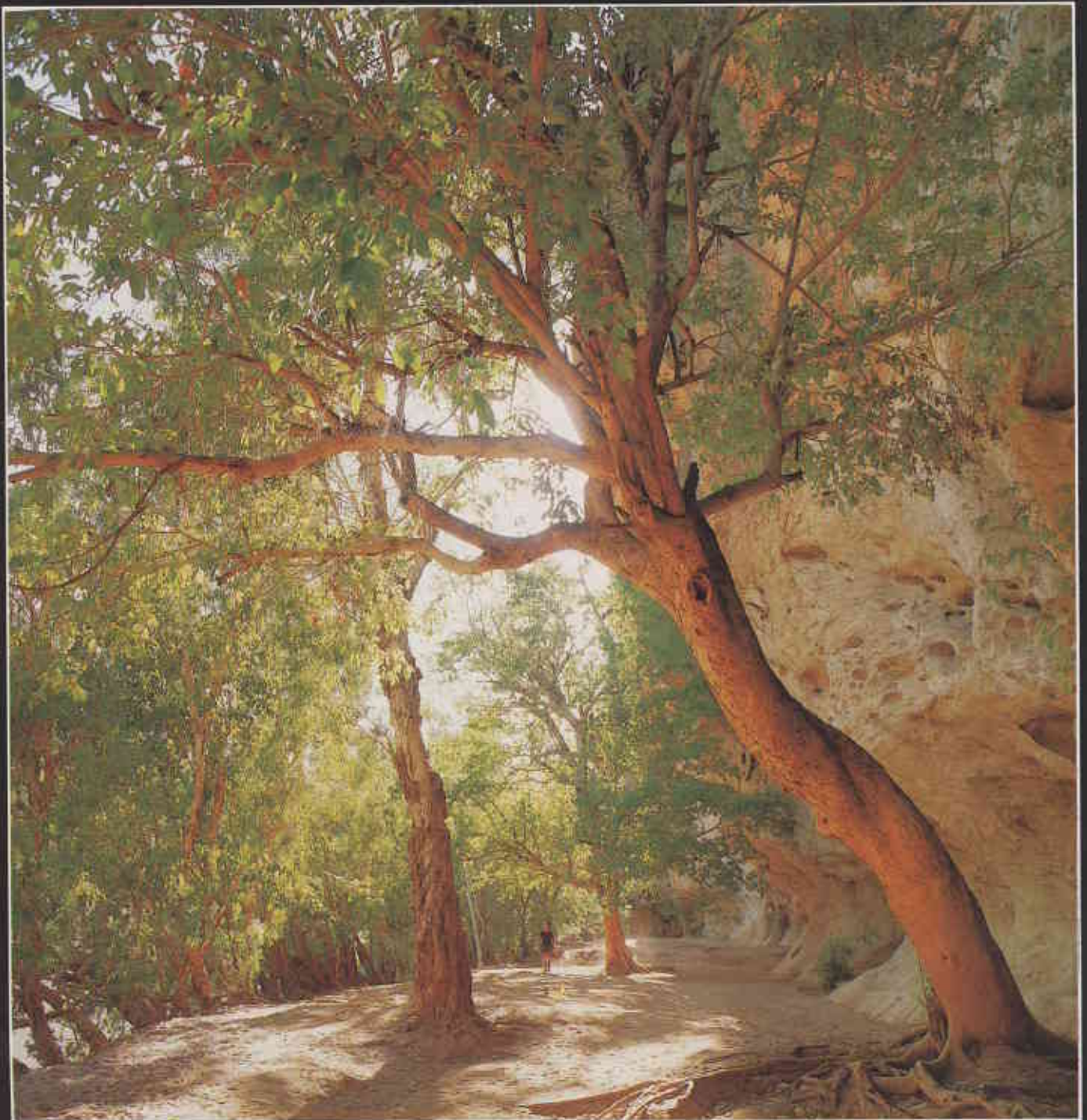
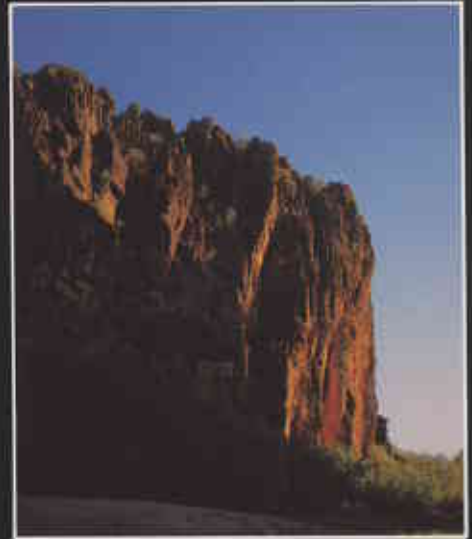
Gelkie Gorge presents itself as a natural work of art. The action of floodwaters on limestone over thousands of wet seasons has formed amazing galleries of sculptured stone (top and above), accentuated in silhouette at sunrise (left).



The permanent waterholes (below) found throughout the ranges provided popular campsites for the aboriginals of the area. A cave in Windjana Gorge (left), said to be of importance to traditional aboriginals, was used by the aboriginal bushranger Pidgin as a hide-out. Lillimilura police station ruins (above) stand as a grim reminder of the punishment meted out to such bushrangers by the early European settlers.



Windjana Gorge is regarded by scientists as one of the most important geological sites in the world. However, most visitors come for the scenery or to watch the birds (right and below).





This creek flowing in a cavern right through a mountain might well have been the inspiration for Coleridge's lines . . .

Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea . . .

For the first-time adventurer, however, the pitch darkness and ice-cold water may be more likely to inspire terror than poetry. Midway down the tunnel the sight of the sun streaming in through the ancient cave calls many to return. For those who continue the tunnel becomes cathedral-like — and then reveals the light at the other end.



For more information:
During the tourist season
(April to October) rangers are
stationed at Windjana Gorge
and Tunnel Creek National
Parks. A permanent ranger
resides at Geikie Gorge
National Park via Fitzroy
Crossing, 6765.

Further details may be
obtained from:

The Regional Manager
Department of Conservation
and Land Management
Papuana Drive
KUNUNURRA 6765

or

Information Branch
Department of Conservation
and Land Management
50 Hayman Road
COMO 6152

Playford, Dr Phillip. *Geology of
Windjana Gorge, Geikie
Gorge and Tunnel Creek
National Parks*, National Parks
Authority, Perth

The centrefold photograph is
available as a 640 mm x 830
mm poster for \$4 including
postage, or \$2 across the
counter from the above
address.

Cover

Pink and Grey Galahs do well to peer cautiously from their perch. Although a familiar species, the picture of the fledgling (right) emphasises the value and vulnerability of even our common wildlife.

Cover Photo: Jiri Lochman

Landscape

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Selling

by *Liana Christensen*

Thousands of kilometres of isolated coastline, numerous deserted airstrips, lack of radar surveillance: the same factors which make W.A.'s Northwest a drug importer's haven also facilitate the less sensationalised crimes of poaching and smuggling wildlife.

Trafficking in native fauna is an extremely attractive criminal proposition. It is as lucrative as drugs — some estimate an annual turnover in excess of \$40 million — and it is far less risky. Large operations, including the Mafia, are believed to be involved in both activities. Having established a safe route, they set up a 'conveyor belt' moving drugs into the country and sending wildlife out. In a telephone interview reported in *The Bulletin*, ex-Mafia boss Vincent Teresa claimed that bird smuggling was 'a racket that is just getting bigger and bigger'.

Smuggling is one of the major problems facing our State's 32 wildlife officers. In the Northwest, some wildlife officers are responsible for districts covering hundreds of thousands of square kilometres. They work in close connection with the local police, as well as federal police and customs officers. Typically, a wildlife officer will make ten-day patrols — which often stretch into two weeks because of problems with terrain or weather — checking known or likely trouble spots.

A Dangerous Job

A wildlife officer's work is often difficult, and sometimes