



# PORONGURUP NATIONAL PARK

A RANGE OF ATTRACTIONS



Only half an hour's drive from Albany towards the Stirling Range National Park, the Porongurup Range rises steeply from the coastal plain. Its stark granite rocks and towering eucalypt trees beckon visitors, whatever the season.

by  
Ian Herford and Ann Burchell



**W**ithin the 2 511-hectare Porongurup National Park, spectacular granite formations rising up to 670 metres thrust through a canopy of giant karri trees. Steep-sided gullies protect dense carpets of delicate mosses and ferns, which are sustained by the early morning mists that often hang over the granite peaks.

The climate is typically Mediterranean with cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers. Most of the 840 millimetres average annual rainfall occurs during the months of May to September, and the majority of visitors take advantage of the mild autumn and spring weather to visit the Porongurup to enjoy the range of attractions that it has to offer.

## GEOLOGY

The range owes its formation to the periodic massive movements in the Earth's crust that shaped the southern and western coasts of Australia.

It is composed of granite dated at about 1 100 million years old. The granite

**K**arri, jarrah and marri combine to create a variety of forest habitats in the range. These marri trees form an open forest between Nancy and Hayward Peaks.  
Photo – Alex Bond



### Previous page

**Main:** The rounded granite boulders of the Porongurup Range have been sculpted by the forces of nature from 1100 million-year-old granites.

Photo – Alex Bond

**Inset:** The attractive Porongurup Range billiardiera (*Billardiera granulata*) displays colourful clumps of flowers.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

**Left:** Moist, rotting leaves and fallen logs nourish more than 300 species of fungi, found in the Porongurup National Park.  
Photo – Ann Burchell

is believed to be a melted portion of the Australian continental plate, which cooled under intense pressure at least 10–12 kilometres below the surface.

One theory suggests that this was associated with the collision between the Antarctic and Australian continental land masses at the birth of the Gondwanan supercontinent. This theory also connects the origin of the Stirling Range, only 30 kilometres away, with the separation of Antarctica from Australia at the time of the breakup of the Gondwanan supercontinent. If correct, the theory means that when you view the Stirling Range from the Porongurup Range, you literally look from the beginning to the end of Gondwana.

Erosion of the surrounding softer

rocks resulted in the harder granites being exposed as a mountain range. The exposed granites were then eroded forming large, bare, round-topped peaks interspersed by deeply incised valleys. Features, such as the Devil's Slide, mark faults through the granite.

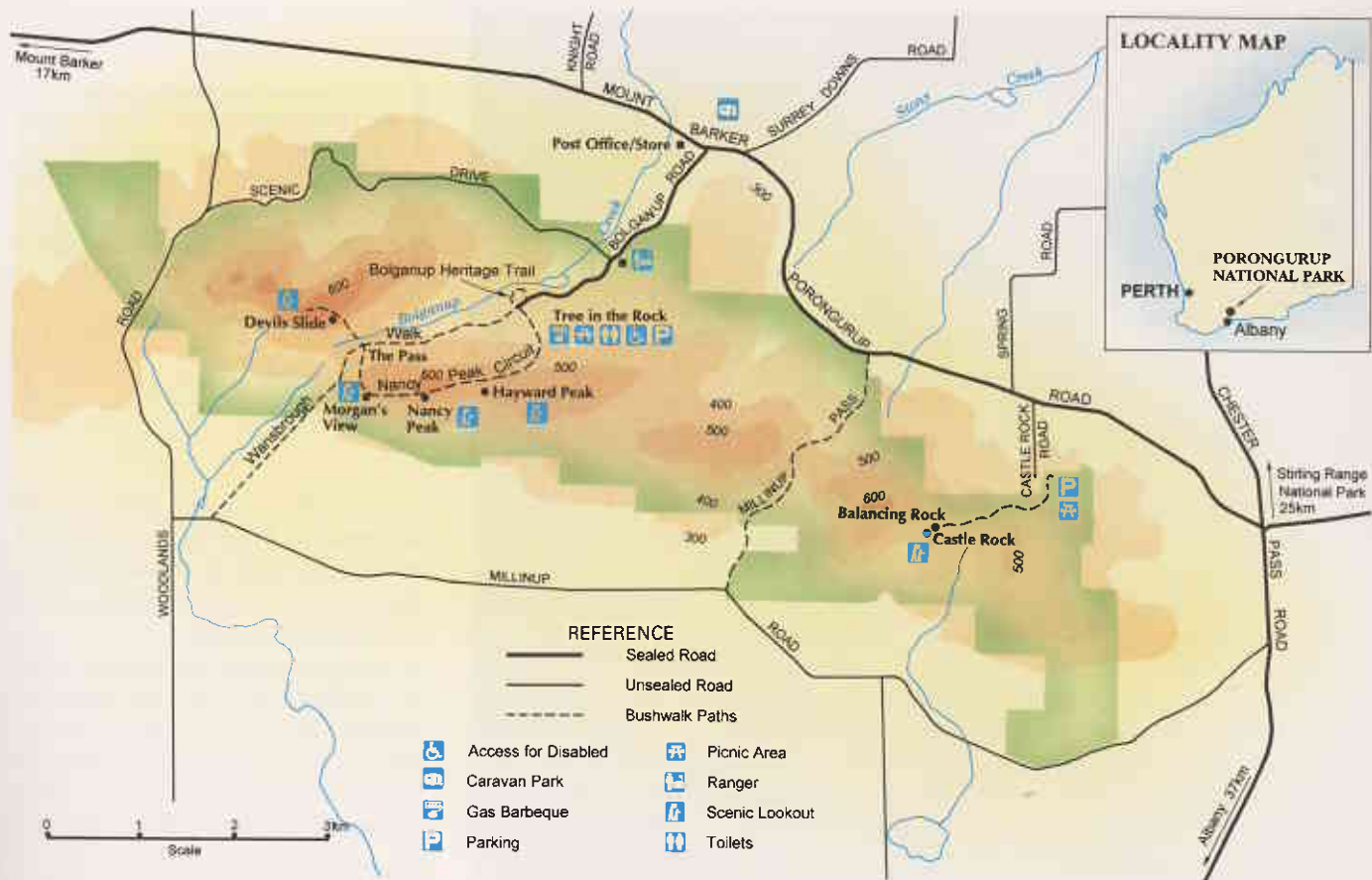
The granite hills of the Porongurup Range were true islands during the Eocene period 55 million years ago, when the sea covered coastal areas inland as far as the Stirling Range.

## ABORIGINAL HISTORY AND CULTURE

Prominent geological features usually figure significantly in Dreaming stories. Although the Dreaming stories for the







Porongurup Range have been difficult to trace, the range has been traditionally regarded as a highly significant ceremonial place—a view still held by Nyoongar (locally spelt 'Noongar') people today. It is connected to Perth by a Dreaming Track, used for journeys linking important locations.

The area is also known for the presence of 'spirits'. The *janak*, an evil spirit, is particularly feared. Aboriginal people try to avoid the range at night because the *janak* is attracted by the smell of fat cooking on a camp fire. Another is the *mummy*, a friendly spirit in the form of a small hairy man.

Aboriginal people occupied areas near the range for thousands of years. Evidence of the economic importance of these areas to the Nyoongars occurs in reports by early European explorers, who noted cleared pathways running to and from the range and around it, as well as large areas of mosaic burning. Although no archaeological sites have yet been recorded in the national park, one artefact scatter nearby has been registered.

Nyoongar people are keen to maintain their traditional ties with the land, and in particular, to ensure that their culture is transferred to future generations. Local elders take groups of school children into the park to teach

them about Nyoongar traditions and culture. Stories about the formation of the mountains and about mythological beings are still passed from generation to generation within the Nyoongar community.

### EXPLORERS AND SETTLERS

When Englishman Captain Matthew Flinders, aboard HMS *Investigator*, first recorded sighting the Stirling Range on 5 January 1802, he must also have seen the Porongurup, but probably thought them to be the same range.

Major Edmund Lockyer, the representative of the Governor of New South Wales, observed the Porongurup Range through his telescope in 1826. He noted the foliage of the tall trees surrounding them and conjectured that the range was a more fertile area. He made an expedition north from the settlement of King George Sound (then an outpost of NSW) on 13 February 1827, in the vicinity of the upper Kalgan River.

Although the Porongurup Range was visible to these early settlers of Fredrickstown (Albany), it was not until 1828 that a party, led by Captain Wakefield, climbed the hill on the eastern side of the range. Wakefield learnt the names of the southern range

(*Purringorep*, now the Porongurup Range) and the northern range (*Corjernurruf*, now the Stirling Range after Governor Stirling) from his Aboriginal guides Mokare and Nankina.

The next official expedition was made by Ensign Dale in 1832. In his journal of the expedition Dale noted:

"On the 22nd [January 1832], we proceeded five miles, preserving a N. by E. Course, to a large lake with an island in the centre called Morandee. As Nankina informed us that we should not find any water till we reached the Kalgan or French river, distant about eleven miles, we stopped here for two hours. From Morandee we proceeded over hills of moderate elevation, ascending gradually the eastern side of the Porongurup [*sic*] Mountains. . ."

On the return journey, Dale camped with his party on the northern edge of the range and then traversed it through what is now Millinup Pass.

Botanist James Drummond also wrote of two visits (1843 and 1848) to collect plant specimens for shipment to other botanists in England. He wrote of a 'fine yellow flowered species of *Villarsia*, ... [the leaves of] some plants fully a foot in breadth. I gathered this plant on Christmas Day 1843 in the crevices of the hummocks of granite rock called Stirling Castle on the very top of the Range'



**Left:** The southern heath monitor can often be seen warming itself in a patch of sunshine.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

**Below left:** The path up Devil's Slide challenges walkers to reach the highest point in the range (670 metres).

Photo – Marie Lochman

[probably Twin Peaks]. He also described the karris as 'the finest trees I have ever seen in any country', and the mosses and lichens 'as rank and luxuriant as I have ever seen in the moist rich valleys of the south of Ireland'. Of the *Helipeterum cotula* he wrote, 'a beautiful little annual everlasting flower covers the tops of the Porongurup Hills in many places, giving them the appearance of being covered with snow'.

In 1859, the first pastoral lease of 10 000 acres (4 047 ha) was taken up by John McKail, a passenger on the ship *Parmelia*, who saw the potential for raising cattle to provision ships visiting Albany.

As freehold land was released in the 1860s, other pioneer families settled in the district, partially clearing their holdings to grow vegetables and raise dairy and beef cattle. The late 1800s saw an interest in harvesting the giant karri trees for the timber industry, and several

sawmills sprang up over the next 50 years.

In the early 1900s, deer and pheasant were released by one landowner into the range for 'sport' for visiting 'gentlemen'. Fortunately, this venture failed and no deer or pheasants remain.

A thriving wine industry is the latest venture taking advantage of the rich soil of the range. Wine, together with sheep, cattle, tree plantations, fruit and vegetables are the main primary industries of the area.

Tourism has also played a major role since the 1920s, due to the foresight of Seybert J Hayward, then Director of the State Government Tourist Bureau, who recognised the importance of protecting the beauty of the range for all to enjoy. He successfully lobbied to have a timber lease withdrawn from the area between Hayward Peak and Devil's Slide, including Bolganup Ravine (named Hayward Park), and had the area set aside for a national

park. In 1925, an area of 1 157 hectares was vested in the State Gardens Board, and in 1971, after many additions to its boundary, the Porongurup National Park was formally gazetted.

The area became increasingly popular in the 1920s as a tourist destination, and two guest houses were opened (owned by brothers Hugh and Gilbert Faulkner). The Bolganup and Karribank guest houses still welcome visitors today.

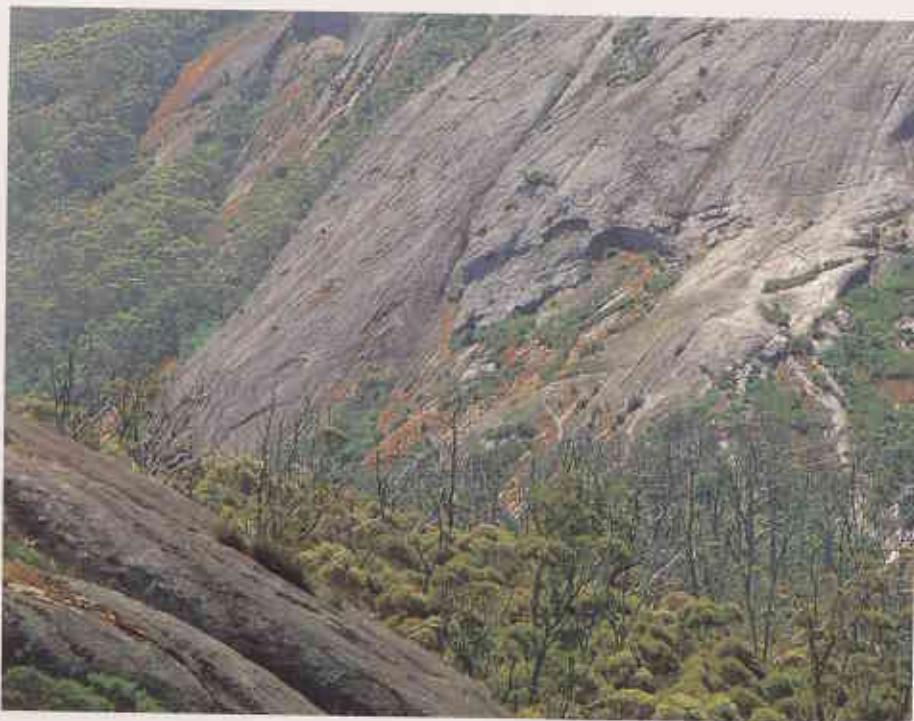
## NATURAL HISTORY

The first impression that most visitors have of the Porongurup Range is the diversity of habitats. The granite outcrops support extensive moss fields, which in turn support a rich herb field of lichens and small flowering plants. In the deeper soils of the rock crevices, bullich and yate communities grow, and in their turn support a variety of understorey plants. The high granite slopes are also where two of the plants endemic to the Porongurup Range are found—the mountain villarsia (*Villarsia calthifolia*), noted by Drummond, with its large glossy leaves and delicate yellow flowers, and the Porongurup hibbertia (*Hibbertia bracteosa*), with large yellow flowers and stem-clasping leaves.

The karri forest surrounding these peaks is a remnant of the forest that extended along the south coast when the climate was wetter. This outlier is sustained by the high rainfall the range attracts, and is nourished by runoff waters seeping down through the humus-rich loams of the granite slopes.

A dense understorey of *Acacia*, *Trymalium*, *Hibbertia*, *Pimela*, *Clematis* and other species typical of karri forest can be found—although two species, karri oak (*Chorilaena quercifolia*) and karri wattle (*Acaciapentadenia*), are noticeably absent.

The jarrah, marri and other woodland





The cool, shaded gullies below the main ridge line encourage the growth of moisture-loving plants, including delicate mosses, in natural 'gardens' like this one near Nancy Peak.

Photo - Alex Bond



areas dominating the laterite soils of the lower slopes, are where the greatest percentage of the 750 plant species in the range occur. In early spring, these forests explode into colour, with the acacia and hovea shrubs competing to be the most vivid. Approximately 55 of the 71 species of orchid in the range can also be found here, as well as 50 species of the Proteaceae family of plants, which include the banksias, dryandras, hakeas and grevillias.

The white sandy areas support a wealth of heathland plants, and small areas of swamp are home to sedges and melaleucas.

The winter rains unlock another surprising kaleidoscope, as the colourful and fascinating forms of more than 300 species of fungus emerge from the rotting logs and leaf litter.

With such a variety of habitats, it is to be expected that the variety of animals in the area would be extensive. Seventy-one bird species have so far been recorded in the Porongurup Range and include Baudin's black cockatoo (*Calyptorhynchus baudinii*) and the red-eared firetail (*Emblema oculata*), both of which are declared in need of special protection.

Wedge-tail eagles soar over the granite hills, while the dense thickets in the moist gullies protect colourful wrens and robins. Rufous treecreepers can often be seen busily hopping up and down the tall trees in the picnic areas.

Most of the mammals that inhabit the park are nocturnal and so are rarely seen by the casual visitor. However, western grey kangaroos are often seen by walkers, and brushtail possums may be spotted in the picnic area at dusk. The Porongurup Range is also home to pygmy possums, honey possums, mardo (yellow-footed antechinus), mootits (bush rats) and quenda (southern brown bandicoots).

Of the 17 species of reptile so far

recorded in the park, the most likely to be seen sunning themselves are the King's skink (*Ergernia kingii*), the southern heath monitor (*Varanus rosenbergi*) and the marbled gecko (*Phyllodactylus marmoratus*).

Some of the unusual creatures that can be found in the range include the trapdoor spider *Neohomogona bolganupensis*, a survivor of Gondwana that is found in the moist gullies, a giant earthworm and some unusual land snails that have adapted to the harsher environment of the peaks.

## CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

Porongurup National Park is a small park with irregular boundaries, and this makes it complex to manage.

The most important conservation management issues in the park are weed

control, fire management and the provision of information to visitors.

Of the 750 or so plant species in the park, more than 100 are weeds! Control of these weeds, which include blackberry and taylorina, is a major management task. In addition, some 20 hectares of the northern flank of the range is now covered with silky wattle, introduced from the eastern states, which is still spreading. The existence of so many weeds is a threat to native plants and continued efforts will be required to control them.

The management of fire in mountain areas is always a complex issue because of the terrain and the unpredictability of fire behaviour in steep country. The park has a history of major wildfires, and the karri forest on the range has suffered severe damage caused by a number of fires that escaped from agricultural clearing burns earlier this century. More





recently, in March 1966, a fire burnt for more than two weeks in the park, seriously damaging many mature karri trees.

One of the objectives of fire management in the Porongurup Range is to minimise the risk of severe wild fires. But fire is also used to create a mosaic of different fuel ages so that the differing habitat needs of various animals in the park are met. Fire management in the park is a cooperative effort between CALM and the local community.

A dedicated group of local people have formed the 'Friends of the Porongurup Range'. The Friends have been active in the park for some years, having been involved in everything from surveying weeds to assisting with the construction and maintenance of the path network. The involvement of the local community in this way is of enormous benefit in effective park management.

A draft management plan for the Porongurup and Stirling Range National Parks is currently being prepared by CALM. The plan will address all the major management issues in the park and is being prepared in close consultation with the community. A Planning Advisory Committee, comprising local people with a range of backgrounds and interests, has been involved throughout the planning process, and includes a number of representatives from the Porongurup community. The draft plan is due to be released for public comment later this year.

With increasing numbers of visitors enjoying the delights of the park, the potential for impacts on fragile environments also increases. The provision of information on the values of the park and how to enjoy them while treading lightly on the land is an important element in the management of conservation values.

**Top left:** Colourful birds, like this red-winged fairy-wren, seek protection in the dense thickets of mountain gullies.  
Photo - M & I Morcombe

**Centre left:** Many of the park's animals are nocturnal, but western grey kangaroos are often seen by walkers.  
Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Left:** The laterite soils of the lower slopes support a forest of jarrah and banksia.  
Photo - Alex Bond



A permanent ranger is stationed at the park headquarters on Bolganup Road. In addition, facilities are provided for the convenience and enjoyment of visitors, and to encourage people to use the areas best able to accommodate them.

## SITES AND FACILITIES

Porongurup National Park is very popular with locals and tourists alike. Its landforms and glorious scenery, together with its diverse vegetation and animal life, provide a memorable experience for visitors. The best way to appreciate the beauty of the range is to begin your visit with a circuit around its foothills.

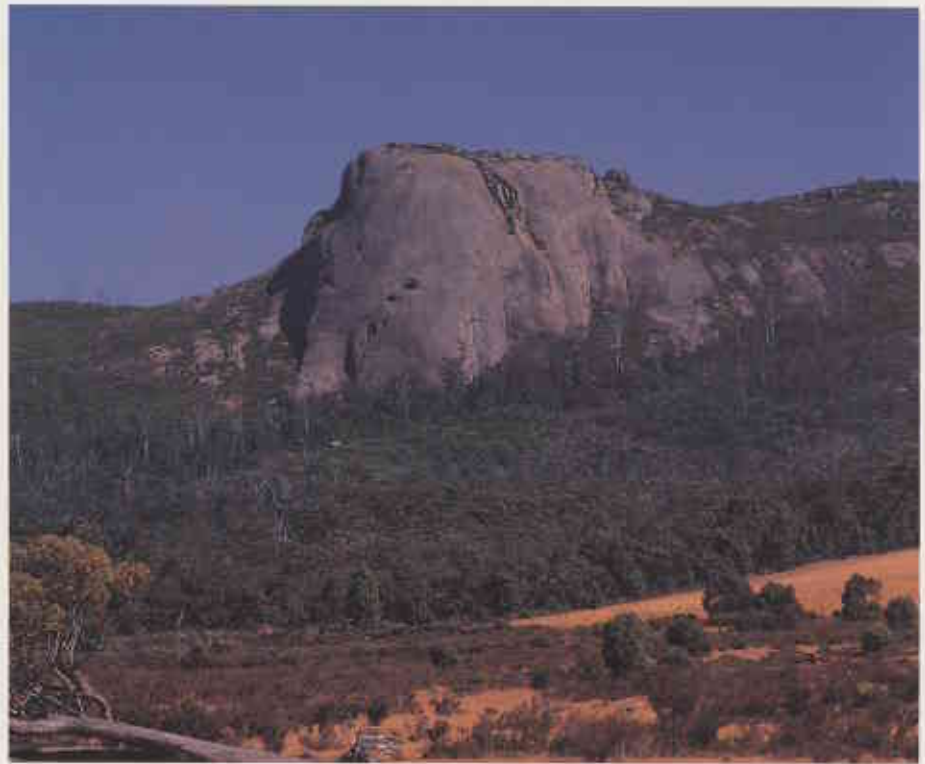
Turn west into Millinup Road from Chester Pass Road. This gravel road affords spectacular vistas of the range across cleared farmland. The imposing granite domes and the impressive Twin Peaks almost cry out to be photographed.

From Millinup Road, turn north into Woodlands Road and then into the scenic drive. This beautiful road winds through the northern foothills of the range and drops into moist valleys, flanked by majestic karri trees. Through the trees you can glimpse the stark beauty of Gibraltar Rock, which soars up from the side of the road.

A right turn into Bolganup Road brings you to the main recreation site in the park, the 'Tree in the Rock' picnic area. This site, set among the karri trees, almost has the feel of a cathedral, with the towering karris providing the domed roof. There is a feeling that you should whisper as you stand amid such grandeur. The site has gas barbecues, an information shelter and toilet facilities.

The 'tree in the rock', after which the picnic site is named, is just 100 metres along a shaded walk. Extending its roots down through a crevice, a mature karri clings to existence on a granite boulder. The path continues beyond this site to link with the longest walk in the park, the Nancy Peak Circuit. This path winds up the northern side of the range and then along its very spine. Take care: the rocks can be slippery, especially when they are wet. As always, please stay on the paths provided.

As well as the beauty of the moss-covered granite rocks and the forest above, the views are magnificent. The Stirling Range is clearly visible to the north and, on a clear day, you can see the Southern Ocean to the south.



The path brings you to the Wansborough Walk, which crosses the range through a pass of the same name. Downhill, to your right, is the picnic area at the start of the walk, while straight ahead, is the path to the highest point in the range, Devils Slide. This is a slightly more challenging walk, but is well worth the effort.

At the eastern end of the park is the path to Castle Rock. To get there, turn south from the Porongurup-Mt Barker Road into Castle Rock Road. At the end of the road is a carpark, which is the starting point for the walk. The path winds past the famous 'balancing rock' and brings you to the foot of a ladder. A short climb and you are ready to cross a bridge

**Above:** The Porongurup area is known for its beautiful landscapes and its award-winning wines.

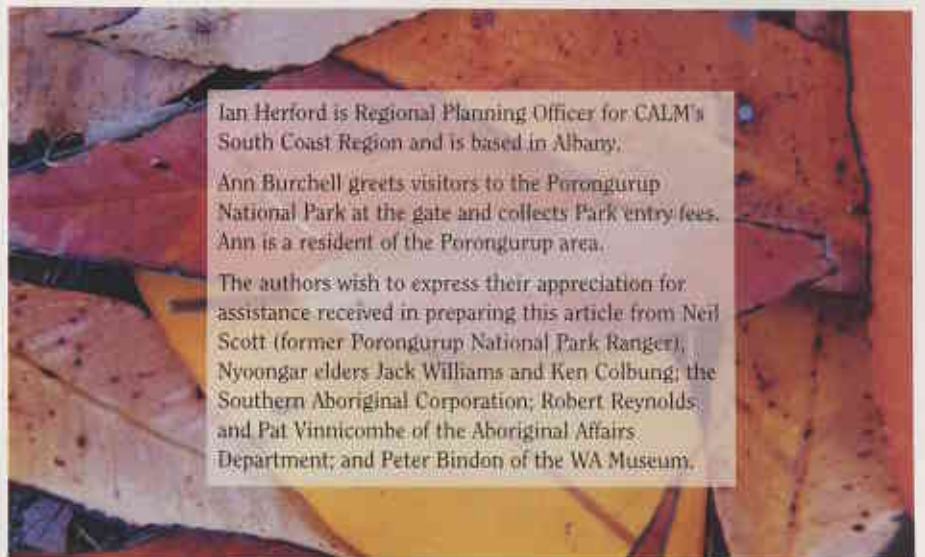
Photo - Jiri Lochman

**Below:** Multi-coloured leaves carpet the ground beneath majestic karri trees.

Photo - Ann Burchell

(built with the help of the army in 1977) and stand on Castle Rock itself. The views are simply stunning.

Having completed your tour of the national park, now is a good time to drop in to one of the local wineries and sample some of the famous Porongurup wine. Perhaps take some home with you or, if you are lucky enough to be staying in the area, you can enjoy a bottle while the sun sets on this 'Range of Attractions'.



Ian Herford is Regional Planning Officer for CALM's South Coast Region and is based in Albany.

Ann Burchell greets visitors to the Porongurup National Park at the gate and collects Park entry fees. Ann is a resident of the Porongurup area.

The authors wish to express their appreciation for assistance received in preparing this article from Neil Scott (former Porongurup National Park Ranger), Nyoongar elders Jack Williams and Ken Colbung; the Southern Aboriginal Corporation; Robert Reynolds and Pat Vinnicombe of the Aboriginal Affairs Department; and Peter Bindon of the WA Museum.



# LANDSCOPE

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*This killer whale, photographed at Ningaloo, is one of 36 marine mammals living off the WA coastline. Read about them on page 16.*

*Thanks largely to CALM's fox-control programs, the recovery of the woylie has been so swift that the species has now been taken off the threatened fauna list (see page 10).*



*Spring flowers thrive on a moss carpet—one of the range of attractions on offer in the Porongurup National Park (see page 28).*



*LANDSCOPE Expeditioners made some interesting discoveries during last year's expedition to Queen Victoria Spring. Read all about them on page 23.*



*The rose mallee is just one species benefiting from action by recovery teams working together for conservation (see page 36).*

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*A new book, Broome and Beyond, takes an in-depth look at the plants, such as this *Pittosporum molluccanum*, people and cultures of the Dampier Peninsula, in Western Australia's Kimberley Region. The story on page 48 takes a brief glimpse into this exciting new book.*

*Illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky*



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**Design and production:** Maria Duthie, Sue Marais  
**Finished art:** Gooitzen van der Meer  
**Illustration:** Gooitzen van der Meer  
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