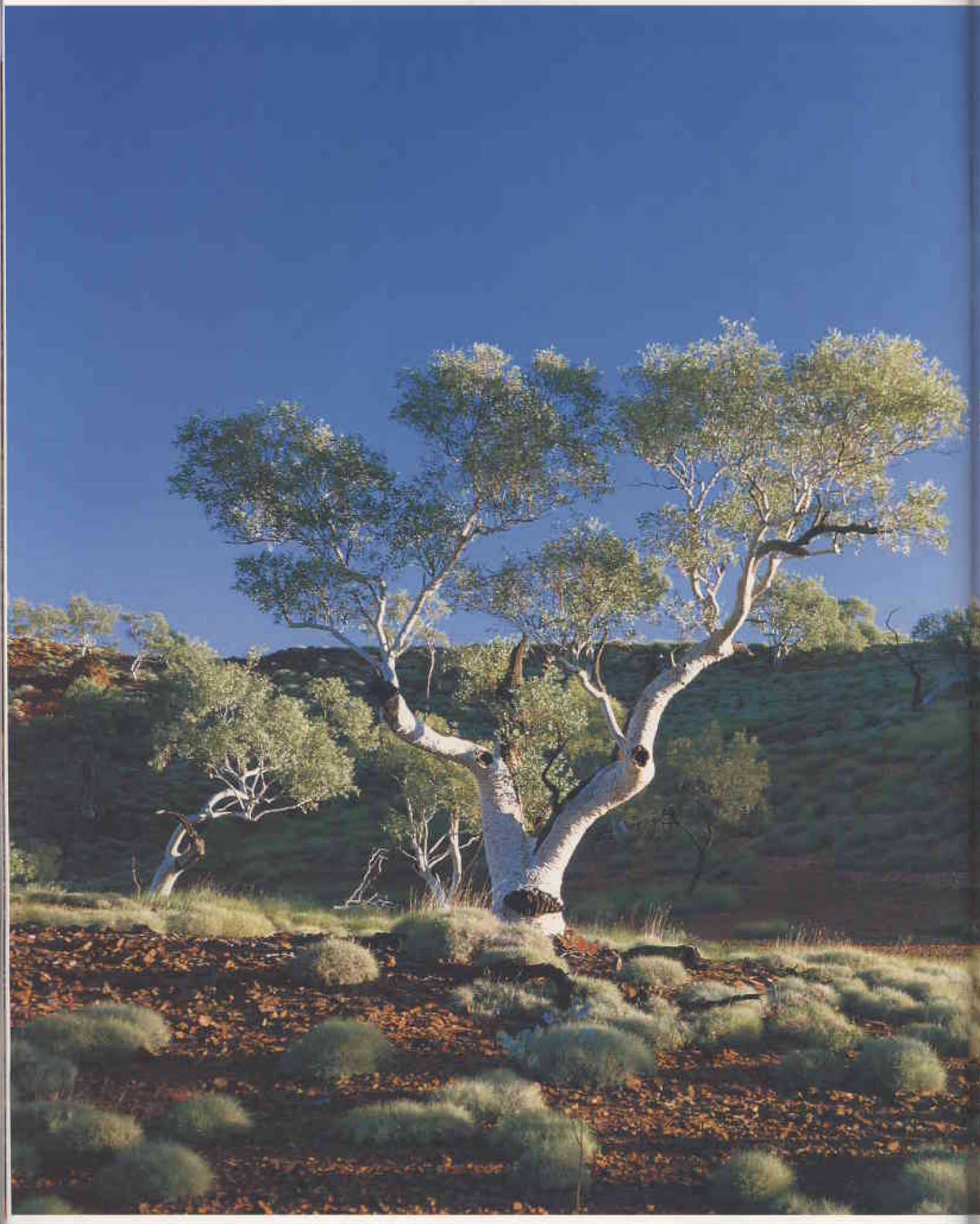
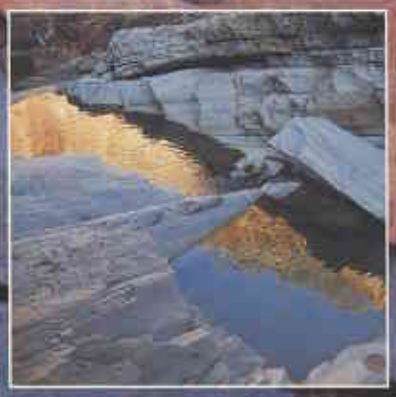


# In a different light

## A photo essay by Cliff Winfield

Way back in 1985, the very first issue of *LANDSCOPE* featured 'The Ever-Changing Light', a photo essay by Cliff Winfield. The theme of the essay was that the landscape of the Pilbara was so stunning, yet so difficult to capture on film.



In the introduction to the 1985 essay, Cliff said of his photography: "Capturing the massive landscape and its variety of textures and hues presents problems of perspective, contrast and light".

Having just returned from a recent holiday in Karijini National Park—the first time back there since 1984—Cliff called *LANDSCOPE* to say that the Pilbara landscape still stirred emotions of awe and wonder, but this time his journey took on new dimensions.

Late afternoon—cruising at speed and heading north-east on a silky grey sealed road with barely a ripple on its surface. It snakes elegantly along the mulga and spinifex floor of the valley towards a horizon outlined with the familiar shapes of the hills of the Hamersley Range. Contrast this to my last visit to the Pilbara when it was a solid drive from anywhere on very rough, tyre bruising, rocky, dusty roads. In those days, the arrival itself had a sense of achievement, the scenery was an amazing bonus.


## ANTICIPATION

Because the scenery is so easy to get to now, would my sense of arrival be less this time? Would there be thousands of tourists everywhere? I had been in these hills many times, and felt moved by their grandeur and raw beauty. I'd even say they were some of my favourite places on this earth. But as we drew closer, I felt a bit like I was about to meet an old friend after many years, and I found myself wondering whether they would be as special as I remembered them. Wondering whether our relationship had survived.

This time my travelling companions were my family, including two small boys. I knew the gorges had claimed several lives—including a young boy. I wondered whether safety would still be an issue.

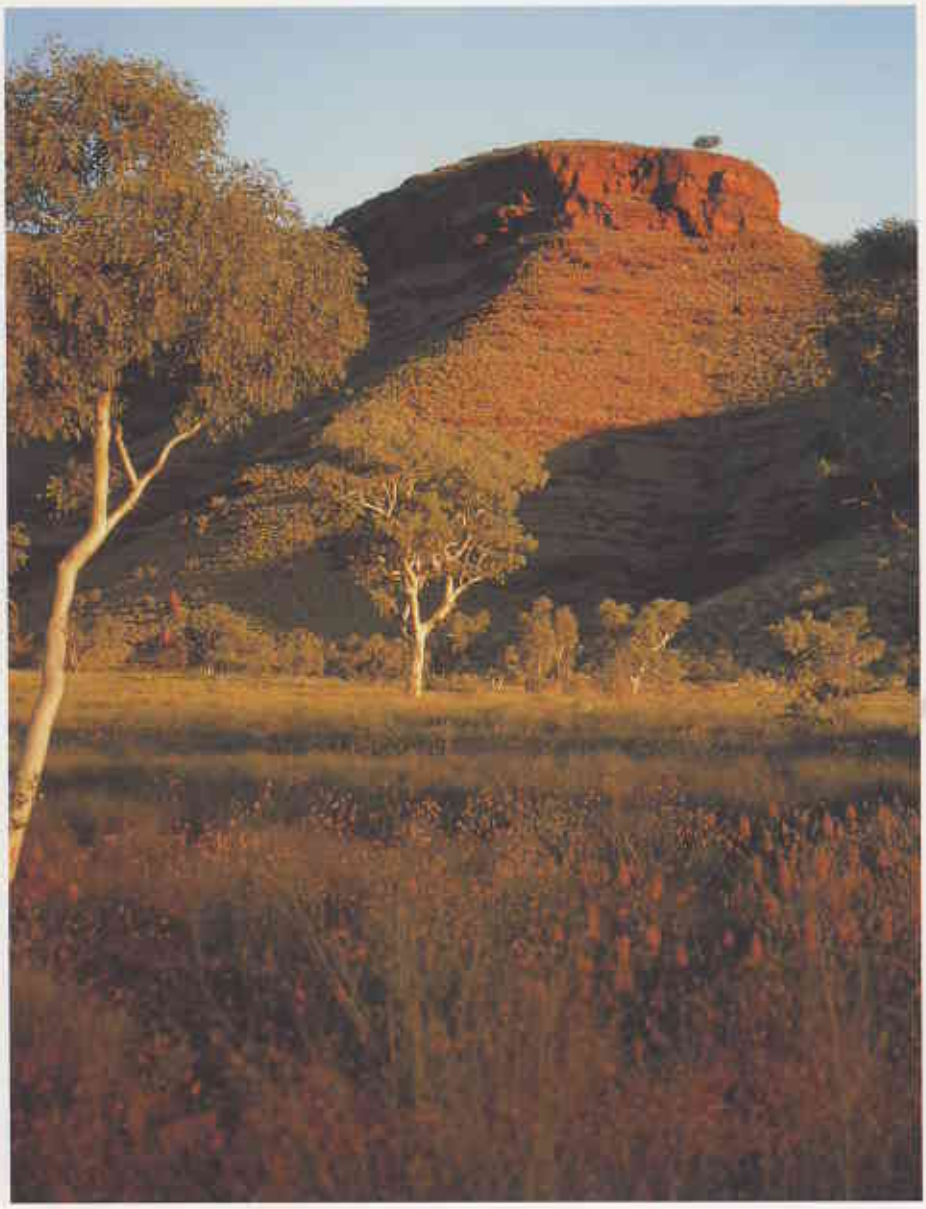
Obviously, the red rock hills and the ever-changing light would still be there. Much else had changed, though. The new highways, iron ore mines adjacent to the national park, joint management with Aboriginal people, a flash new visitor centre (see 'Karijini Dreaming' on page 10), and of course probably ten-fold more visitors. Even the name of the national park was new—Karijini.

Then the setting sun began turning bright burnt orange. In a matter of minutes, the west-facing slopes of the hills started to glow as if they were red hot. They have probably done this for three billion years, but if you've just arrived from a city, or flat farmland, or a green forest, these glowing hills are awesome to behold and once again my passion for the Pilbara flowed back.

## MORNING, DAY TWO

Looks like rain on the horizon! Previous visits to Karijini were characterised by a crystal clear blue sky and stark shadows and light. In the thickening cloud, the colours were becoming soft and pastel. I could see that in many ways, on this visit, I would view Karijini in a different light.

The Pilbara is not really my country; I grew up alongside a very different national park. I used to watch the runway lights of Perth airport from the edge of the scarp in John Forrest National Park. I'd watch the coming and going planes and wonder about their destinations—mostly 'up north'. Compared with today, air travel was very expensive, and both the journey and the destinations were exotic experiences for me. So, during my previous visits to the Pilbara, I'd been a consumer of the scenery and the experience—a visitor in a foreign land—intrigued by the new and the spectacular, and influenced by the 'last



*Previous page*
*Main:* Snappy gums, red dirt and spinifex—true Pilbara country.
*Inset:* Liquid gold light on the floor of a gorge.

*Left:* The hills begin to glow in the late afternoon sun.

frontier' culture that pervaded. I had perhaps been naive to the issues confronting the park managers.

I now work in park and visitor services management in the tall forests of the south-west. I have come to realise that one of the most important issues in park management is preserving the visitor experience. As a consumer, I used to pursue the 'magic spots' in the bush that required effort to get to, but rewarded that effort with great beauty, solitude—or good fishing.

Access to wild places is easier now. Air travel is affordable, four-wheel-drive vehicles have proliferated, the highway network has extended and the road surfaces have improved, and of course the information revolution has occurred. I learnt a lesson about communication. I once published in a magazine a few spectacular pictures of one of my magic spots. When I went there next, half-a-dozen four-wheel-drive vehicles were snuggled in to *my* place by the river.

We have a very mobile population, and now there are many more visitors to my 'magic spots'. In response to visitor pressure, many of those places have been 'hardened' to preserve the environment. Tracks become roads, beaches get car parks, toilets, showers and change-rooms, and riverside campfires become gas barbecues.

We camp at Dales Campground. Middle of the night, pouring rain on the tent, everyone else seems to be fast asleep. I'm there with images of the family being swept into Dales Gorge in a flash flood. You know how things seem a lot worse in the pitch black. Wide-awake, I set forth to solve the problem of magic spot thieves. They had short-circuited my system. I'd given them the image and the location of the magic spot, so they got to it without having to put in the hard work.

I'd been reading earlier in the night. Now, at three in the morning, it was

*Above:* Textured plants atop *Jarndunmunha* (Mount Nameless) looking into Karijini National Park.

*Right:* Tiny specks—risk-takers at the base of one of Joffre George's red rocky walls.

*Left:* View from Knox Gorge Lookout across the pastel, spinifex-clad hills.

*Below:* Mt Bruce displays the classic Pilbara palette in rich light-yellow grass, red-brown rocks and deep blue sky.

clear to me that you can look at our national parks as if they were libraries. There is a range of libraries, from the State Reference Library to the corner video library. Most libraries are multi-purpose (apologies to librarians who I'm sure have different words for 'multi-purpose'). *Thomas the Tank Engine* and other kids' books on the left, light-weight magazines and papers on the right, fiction straight ahead, over there the non-fiction—how to raise chooks, play cricket or grow camellias—and then the reference section.

So, should our parks be like libraries? Some have light-weight 'been there, done that, tick it off' experiences, some hold Pullitzer Prize novels—the more pages you turn, the more intriguing and rewarding they get. Some have really good guided discoveries for kids. Some are kept purely for scientific reference. But then again, a lot of people read comics. Eventually I fell asleep again.

There must be a better way than hardening sites to protect them. If you apply yourself to discovering the intricacies of the park, you should be rewarded. Managers must not seek to homogenise the experiences, so that each park site looks the same but in a different landscape. Let's have a range of some places with no interpretation, to some places with visitor centres; places you can only get to after a hike on foot, to places where 40-seat coaches can deliver people in wheelchairs; places with backpack tenting, to others with serviced cabins. We need to plan and provide a spectrum of places to visit, and to protect that ethereal notion of reward for effort.

Probably the most important change since the 1980s is the advent of park management plans. They give communities an opportunity to have their say on what happens to their favourite places, and park managers

an opportunity to air their strategies to preserve biodiversity. The real challenge is for park planners to provide for this spectrum of experiences.

At Karijini, what appears to be a veneer of commerciality—the visitor centre, the smooth sealed roads and the regimented camping grounds—are probably the newspapers and magazines of my national park library. These 'modern necessities' make the values of the park more accessible to a wider population and, in the scheme of things, that can only be of benefit both in the understanding of the values of this park and in the acceptance of the great challenges confronting park managers generally. But what has it done to the experience?

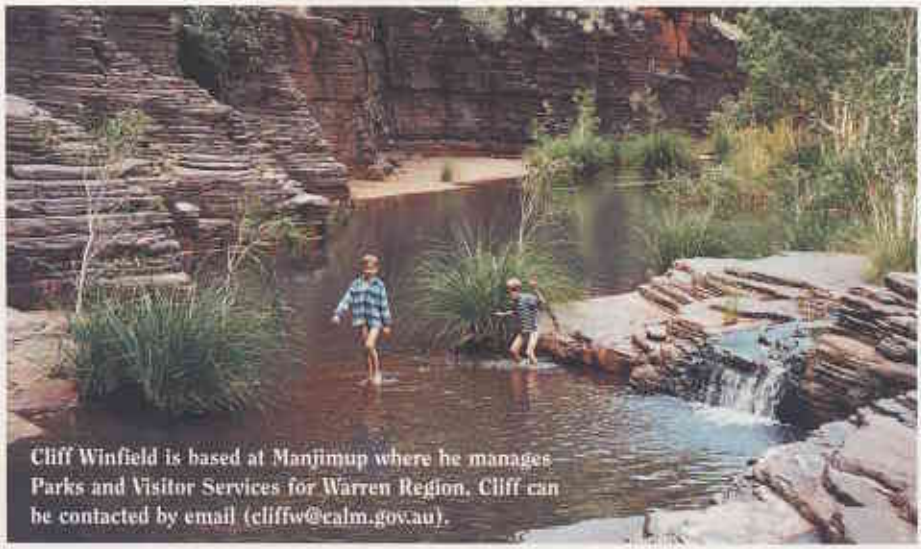
I guess, for me, Karijini does provide challenges for the risk takers, protection from natural hazards for the vulnerable, comfort for those addicted to it and security of ecological values, while it evokes respect for the traditional owners. The boys complained that there was nowhere in the campground to play cricket!

So my return visit turned out to be a journey through time and space, trying to come to terms with preserving the experiences of the past—in a brave new world. Once again, apologies to librarians!

*Above:* Dramatic, black, rain-laden sky over our sunlit campground.

*Above right:* Looking down into Dales Gorge from the safety of the lookout.

*Right:* The boys cooling their heels in the chilly waters of Dales Gorge.



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Winner of the 1998 Alex Harris Medal for excellence in science and environment reporting.

# LANDSCOPE

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*Thirteen years in the making, the Cape to Cape Track offers a unique view of WA's most popular national park. See page 28.*

*Karijini's new visitor centre provides a cultural and environmental focus point for visitors. See 'Karijini Calling' on page 10.*

*Dirk Hartog Island is our largest island. It has a fascinating history and a valuable biodiversity. Find out why on page 17.*

*Does the delicate work of Western Australia's botanical artists have a place in the high-tech world of science? See page 23.*

*'Landscape at the Heart' is an account of the first* LANDSCOPE *Expedition to the Carnarvon Range at the edge of the Little Sandy Desert. See page 40.*

## FEATURES



## REGULARS



## COVER

*Aboriginal names have always been part of Australia's history, and many of the well known names for Australian animals are in common use today. 'Ancient animals, ancient names' (page 35) makes a case for adopting more Aboriginal names for our native mammals. The brush-tailed phascogale, for example, was known to Nyoongar people as the 'wambenga'.*

*Cover illustration by Philippa Nikulinsky*

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