



Yanchep National Park

As it approaches its centenary, Yanchep National Park has opened up a whole new realm of experiences for visitors, as its strong Aboriginal history and cultural significance comes to the fore . . .

Above View of Wagardu Lake (Loch McNess).
Photo – Marie Lochman

Facing page

Left Aboriginal trained ranger Wayne Dekker, Didgeridoo and dance performance, a dance lesson with a difference.

Right The significance of the heritage listed buildings are interpreted to visitors on the Wagardu Lake Tour.

Far right Yanchep's koala colony is a popular attraction.

Photos – Gordon Roberts/CALM

Yanchep National Park is one of Western Australia's oldest national parks. Declared in 1905 as a conservation reserve, the park is just 50 kilometres north of Perth's city centre. It is one of the State's most visited national parks, with more than 200,000 visits each year.

The park has abundant native wildflowers and wildlife, and possesses a unique blend of pristine wetlands, enchanting limestone caves and woodlands of banksia and tuart alongside heritage buildings. It has one of WA's largest introduced koala colonies, and its freshwater lake is frequented by many different waterbirds and bushbirds, including grebes, swans, pelicans, cormorants, egrets, kingfishers and honeyeaters.

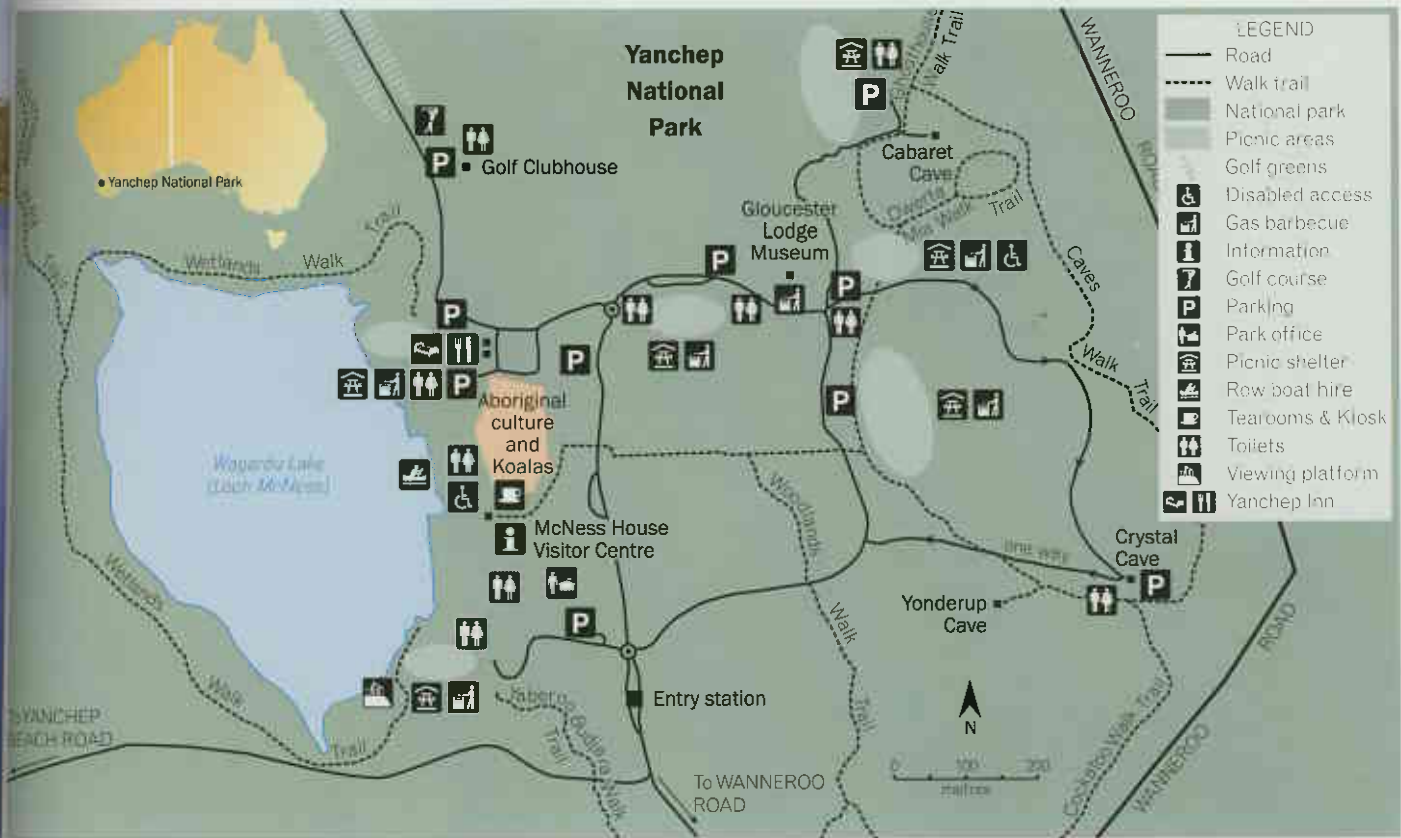
Meeting place

Until recently, however, few people experienced or knew about the park's importance to Aboriginal people. Now, a major improvement program has seen Yanchep National Park reborn as 'Perth's Natural and Cultural Meeting Place.'

Building of the Mia

The area now in Yanchep National Park has been an important meeting place for the Nyoongar Aboriginal groups of the south-west for thousands of years. Members of the Wadjuk and Yuat language groups know it as Wagardu, a very important Dreaming place for both men and women. During the Dreaming, the Great Spirit Women walked north and now this is commemorated by the naming of a trail known as the Yaberoo Budjara, which passes through Neerabup National Park, and ends in Yanchep National Park.

The area has long provided Aboriginal people with a source of sustenance and shelter as well as a place of trade, teaching and social kinship. In 1998, an indigenous program was implemented in the park following a comprehensive consultation process. Endorsement by elders and the broader indigenous community resulted in the creation of the Balga Mia Village—a representation of traditional dwellings



used by the area's first inhabitants. At that time, the park's first Indigenous Heritage Officer was employed.

These first steps soon gave way to a comprehensive indigenous program at the park. There are now five full-time indigenous staff employed to plan, develop and implement tourism programs, including a wide range of Aboriginal cultural activities and tours, in collaboration with other park staff.

Park visitors can now participate in a guided Wagardu Lake tour or Crystal Cave tour or learn traditional dance and how to play the didgeridoo under the tutelage of indigenous officers. There are also opportunities to learn how to throw spears and boomerangs, or to make tools and build mias to experience Nyoongar camp life. Those wanting less strenuous activity can just sit back and learn about the traditional Nyoongar lifestyle and culture in 'Share the Dreaming'.

Award-winning program

In 2002, Yanchep National Park was a finalist in the categories of Heritage and Cultural Tourism in the Western Australian Tourism Awards. In the same year, it was awarded Best Practice status from the Australasian Regional Association of Zoological Parks and



Aquaria (ARAZPA) for exemplary educational activity programs. In 2003, the park was again recognised when the prestigious Premiers Award for Multiculturalism was awarded to Yanchep's Park Manager.

Funding has also been granted to develop an Aboriginal Heritage Plan, which will research, record and interpret the park's many indigenous cultural elements, so future generations who visit the park can be enriched by its indigenous heritage.



park facts

Where is it? 50 kilometres north of Perth. Entry fees apply.

What to do Wagardu Lake tour, Yonderup or Crystal Cave tours, Aboriginal didgeridoo and dance performances, Aboriginal 'Share the Dreaming', rowboat hire, picnicking, walking, viewing koalas, kangaroos and wildflowers.

Facilities Trails and toilet blocks have been designed to accommodate people with disabilities.

Picnic shelters, tables and free gas barbecues throughout the park offer visitors a tranquil and relaxing setting. A sporting oval accommodates more lively activities.

Yanchep Inn has accommodation, bar and restaurant facilities, while the Chawin Mia Lakeview Tearooms offers meals and refreshments. There is a souvenir shop, and the spectacular Cabaret Cave function facility is available for hire.

People can enjoy Yanchep National Park throughout the year, but spring is best for viewing wildflowers.



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