



## Stirling Range National Park

The brooding beauty of the mountain landscape, its stunning and unique wildflowers and the challenge of climbing Bluff Knoll draw bushwalkers and climbers to the Stirling Range National Park.

The jagged peaks of the Stirling Range stretch for 65 kilometres from east to west. The rocks of the range were once sands and silts deposited in the delta of a river flowing into a shallow sea. Deposited over many millions of years, these layers of sediment became so thick and heavy that, in combination with unimaginable forces stretching the Earth's crust in the area, they caused the crust in the area to sink. As the surface subsided, still more sediment was deposited in the depression which was left. The final thickness of sediment, which solidified to become rocks known as sandstones and shales, is believed to be more than 1.6 kilometres!

Over millions of years, the surrounding rocks were worn away by the forces of weathering (physical and chemical breakdown) and erosion (removal of material by water, wind and gravity). It was during this process that the current form of the Stirling Range was sculpted.

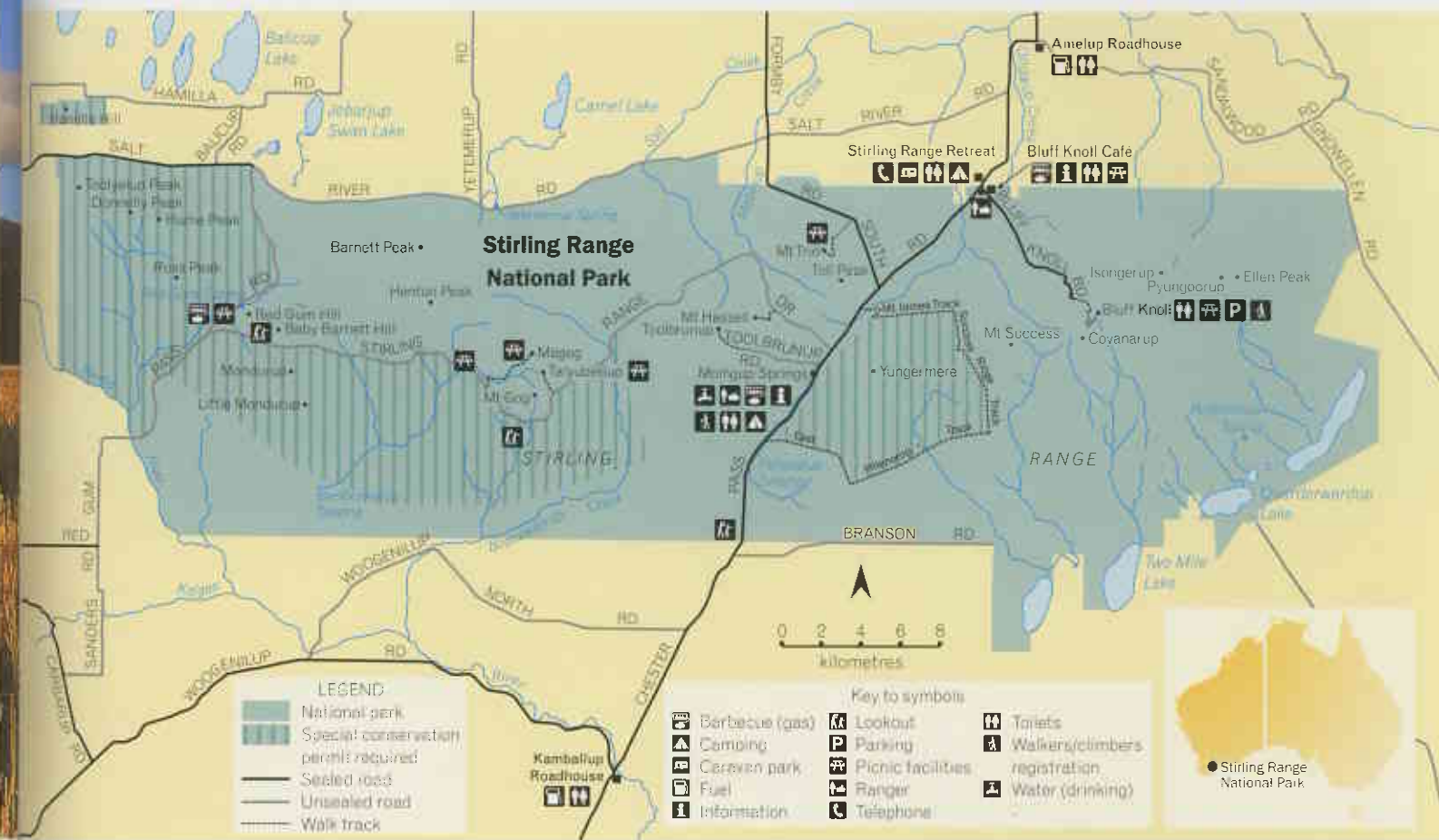
Bluff Knoll, at 1095 metres above sea level, is the highest peak in the South West. The main face of the Bluff forms one of the most impressive cliffs on the Australian mainland.

### History

The Mineng and Goreng people originally lived in and around the Stirling Range and surrounding country. In cold weather they wore kangaroo skin cloaks reaching nearly to the knee. They also built small, conical huts in wet weather. Sticks were placed in the ground and bent to form a cone, then threaded with paperbark, rushes or leafy branches. They told many stories about the Stirling Range, and in many of them the mountains are referred to as dangerous.

Depending on the intent of the speaker, Bluff Knoll is called Bular Mial ('many eyes') or Bala Mial ('his eyes') by the Nyoongar people, the traditional Aboriginal custodians of the region. This was because the rocks

**Above** Bluff Knoll, in the eastern Stirling Range, in the late afternoon.  
*Photo—Rob Oliver*



on the Bluff were shaped like faces. The peak is often covered by mists, which curl around the mountain tops and float into the gullies. These constantly changing mists were believed to be the only visible form of a spirit called Noach, who had an evil reputation.

The range was first observed from the sea by navigator Matthew Flinders in 1802. The area was declared a national park in 1913, at a time where the dominant culture was towards clearing the bush and converting it to farmland.

### Wildflower wonderland

The number and beauty of the wildflowers is staggering and spring wildflower viewing is incredible. Stirling Range National Park is one of the world's most important areas for flora, with more than 1500 species packed within its boundaries. More plant species occur in the Stirling Range than in the entire British Isles, and 87 plant species found in the Stirling Range occur nowhere else on earth, including eight famous mountain bells of the genus *Darwinia*.

Because of their height, and proximity to the south coast, the climate on the peaks differs from that of their surroundings. This is the main

reason for the great variety of wildflowers. There are, for instance, an astonishing 128 orchid species—38 per cent of all known Western Australian orchids.

Thicker grows on the upper levels of all the major peaks. In spring, the thicker is a mass of flowering shrubs. The brilliant pink Stirling Range pixie mops (*Isopegon latifolius*) contrast strongly with the red pea flowers, the yellow dryandras and the white giant candles (*Andersonia axilliflora*). This mass flowering arrives later than that on the lowlands, and is best in October, especially on a misty day when the clouds around the mountains enclose the visitor into this world of colour without the vista of the surrounding farmland.

An ideal time to visit is late spring and early summer (October to December), when the wildflowers are at their best. Winter, between June and August, is cold and wet, and visitors should come prepared. Even in spring the weather can be unpredictable, particularly higher up in the range. Sudden cold changes cause the temperature to drop, and rain or hail to set in. All visitors are strongly advised not to enter the bush or use footpaths on days of extreme fire danger.

### park facts

**Where is it?** The park is about 100 km north-east of Albany via Chester Pass Road.

**Travelling time** Just over one hour from Albany.

**Total area** 115,920 hectares.

**What to do** Bushwalking, mountain climbing, camping, picnicking, birdwatching, wildflower viewing.

**Must see sites** Bluff Knoll, the highest point in the South West, is a mecca for tourists. It takes three to four hours to complete the 5 km return hike.

**Naming** In 1831, Surgeon Alexander Collier recorded the Aboriginal name of the range, 'Koi Kyeuna-ruff', which was provided to him by his Nyongar guide Mokare. Surveyor-General John Septimus Roe travelled to Perth with Governor Sir James Stirling in 1836 and glimpsed 'some remarkable and elevated peaks'. Roe called them the Stirling Range.

**Facilities** Gas barbecues, toilets and picnic tables. There is a camping area at Moingup Springs.

**Nearest CALM office** There are two resident rangers, one at the turn-off to Bluff Knoll and the other at Park Headquarters, near Moingup Springs in Chester Pass. CALM's South Coast regional office is at 120 Albany Highway, Albany, phone (08) 9842 4500.





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