



## Purnululu National Park

The towering domes of the Bungle Bungle Range entice visitors to the remote Purnululu National Park in the Kimberley.

**Above** Hiking through the Bungle Bungle Range.

*Photo – Damon Annison*

*Opposite page*

**Left** Flock of budgerigars.

*Photo – Dennis Sarson/Lochman Transparencies*

**Right** Rock ringtail dragon.

*Photo – Babs and Bert Wells/DEC*

**Bottom right** Rainbow bee-eater.

*Photo – Rob Drummond/Lochman Transparencies*

The towering rocky domes of the Bungle Bungle Range in Purnululu National Park have enchanted human beings with their majestic beauty since the beginning of time. Firstly Aboriginal people of the Kimberley lived near and among the soaring rock forms. They inhabited the region for thousands of years, eking out a living from the surrounding plains and living at one with the ancient landscape.

It wasn't until as recently as the 1980s that this now well-known icon of the outback shot to national fame with its first significant media coverage. This coverage sparked an avalanche of interest—where was this remarkable landform, people asked, and just how did Mother Nature come up with its stunning design?

### The geological attraction

Today, some 25,000 people travel to this remote part of Australia every year to experience the remote national park's astounding natural beauty. They are drawn by the wild assortment

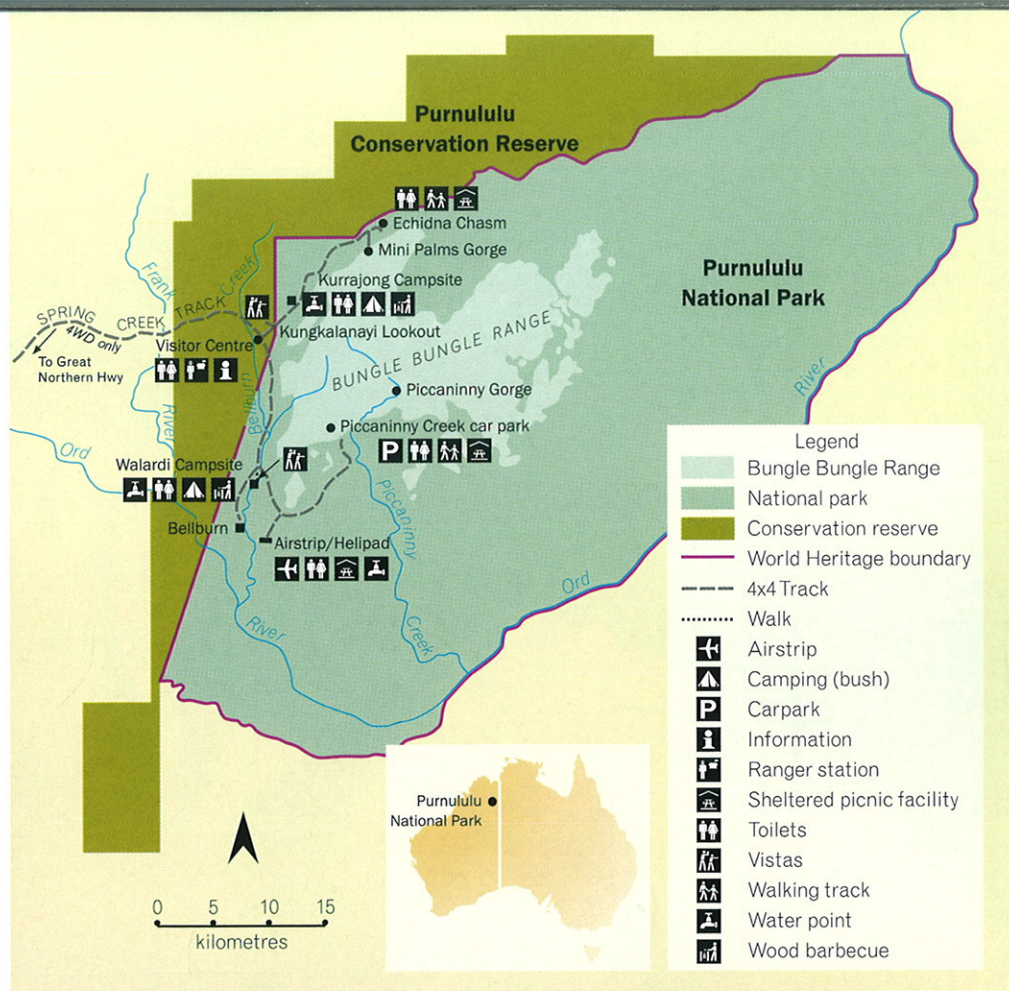
of gorges, canyons and towering rocky domes.

Still more people visit the area on a scenic flight from within the park, or from Halls Creek, Kununurra or Warmun. From the air you can truly appreciate the beauty and vastness of the range. The beehive-shaped domes soar more than 250 metres into the air and stretch to the horizon in an intricate maze of rusty red rocks. The towering gorges change colour, from brown to red, orange and gold, as the sun progresses across the sky. And all around majestic palms grow in striking green contrast to the deep orange of the range's rocks.

The sandstone which makes up the range's rocky domes was deposited some 360 million years ago. Then, over the past 20 million years, the natural forces of rain and water sculpted the range to the intricate network of domes seen today.

The stripy nature of the rocks came about thanks to a bacteria known as cyanobacteria. This dark algae grows on layers of sandstone where moisture





accumulates. The orange bands of colour come from different layers of rock, which dry out too quickly for the cyanobacteria to grow.

It is the geological marvel of the Bungle Bungle Range, and the natural beauty of the park, that has earned Purnululu a World Heritage Area title (see 'World Heritage: protecting the world's most treasured places' on page 6).

### Experiencing the wonders

You can experience this geological wonderland in a variety of different ways. Flying above the range in a plane or helicopter is the best way to gain a perspective of the range's size and beauty. Otherwise, set out on foot on one of the many hiking trails.

While a hike may not give you the perspective you'll gain from the

air, it may enable you to spot some of Purnululu National Park's animal life. Look out for charming rock ringtail dragons sunbaking along the trails or northern nailtail wallabies bounding across the rocks. If you're lucky you may see ghost bats or rockhole frogs hiding deep within crevices in the rocks. And you'll almost certainly delight in some of the prolific bird life. More than 130 bird species occur here, including rainbow bee-eaters and flocks of budgerigars.

The most popular of the walks is the easy hike to Cathedral Gorge. More adventurous hikers can spend two days exploring Piccaninny Creek and Gorge and camp overnight along the way. You can also camp at one of two designated camping areas to truly soak up the spirit of this enchanting place.

### park facts

**Where is it?** The turn-off to the park is 250 kilometres south of Kununurra or 109 kilometres north of Halls Creek. The park access road is accessible only to four-wheel drive vehicles. The park is open only between April and December 31 (weather permitting).

**Total area** 239,723 hectares of national park and 79,602 hectares of conservation reserve.

**What to do** Hiking, photography, camping, nature observation, scenic flights.

**Facilities** Camping at Walardi or Kurrajong camps (both sites have toilets and water). Petrol and supplies available from Turkey Creek, also known as Warmun, which is on Great Northern Highway.

**Nearest DEC office** Kimberley Regional Office, Messmate Way, Kununurra 6743. Phone (08) 9168 4200.





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