

Gloucester National Park

Visit Western Australia's most famous karri tree and make the climb to experience views first witnessed more than 60 years ago by south-west foresters on the lookout for fires.

Just three kilometres from Pemberton, Gloucester National Park is famous for its 60-metre-high Gloucester Tree. For those fit and brave enough to climb to a platform in its crown, the massive karri provides stunning views of the surrounding park and farmland nestled within the karri forest of the south-west of Western Australia.

The Gloucester Tree was chosen for a fire lookout in 1947, one of eight lookouts built in the tallest trees in the karri forest near the towns of Pemberton, Northcliffe and Manjimup between 1937 and 1952. To determine its suitability as a lookout tree, forester Jack Watson climbed it using climbing boots and a belt. The epic climb and return took six hours, and was made even more challenging by the massive seven-metre girth of the tree. This feat is claimed to be a record climb and is recognised in forestry circles as one of the greatest efforts of courage and endurance in the Australian forest.

Pegging the Gloucester Tree's ladder and lopping the upper branches was carried out by another legendary south-western forester, George Reynolds. The construction of the lookout coincided with a visit to the south-west by the

then Governor-General of Australia, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester. The royal party enjoyed a picnic in the bush as they watched Reynolds at work and were suitably impressed as he removed the top-most branches with his axe to enable construction of the lookout.

The Gloucester Tree is one of three karri tree towers which remain open to the public; the others are the Dave Evans Bicentennial Tree and the Diamond Tree. More than 112,000 people visited the Gloucester Tree in 2007 and, while many attempt the climb, not everyone makes it to the top!

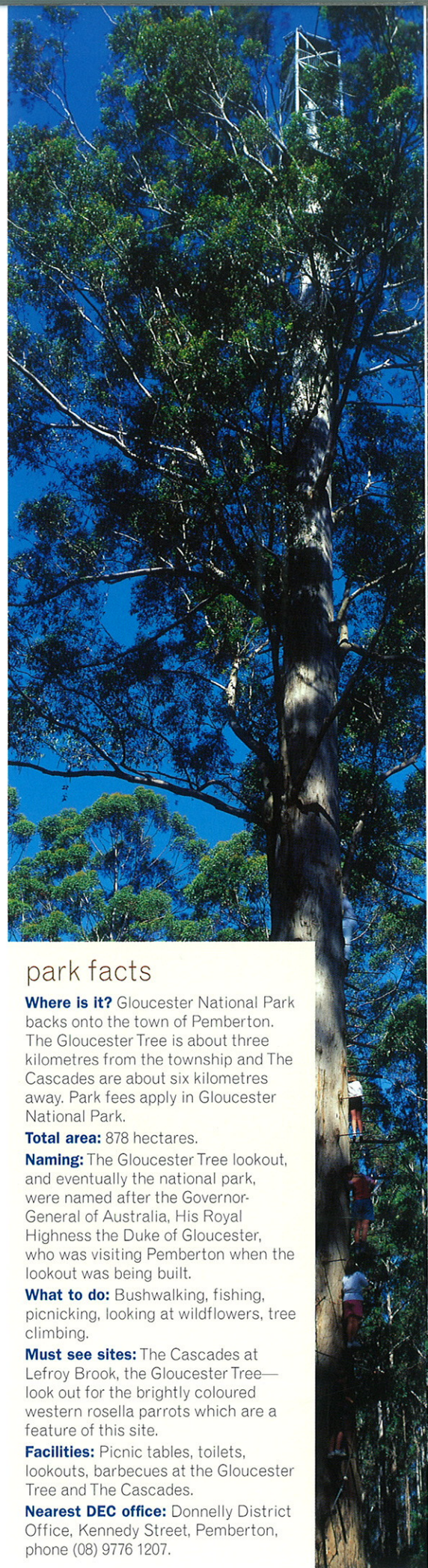
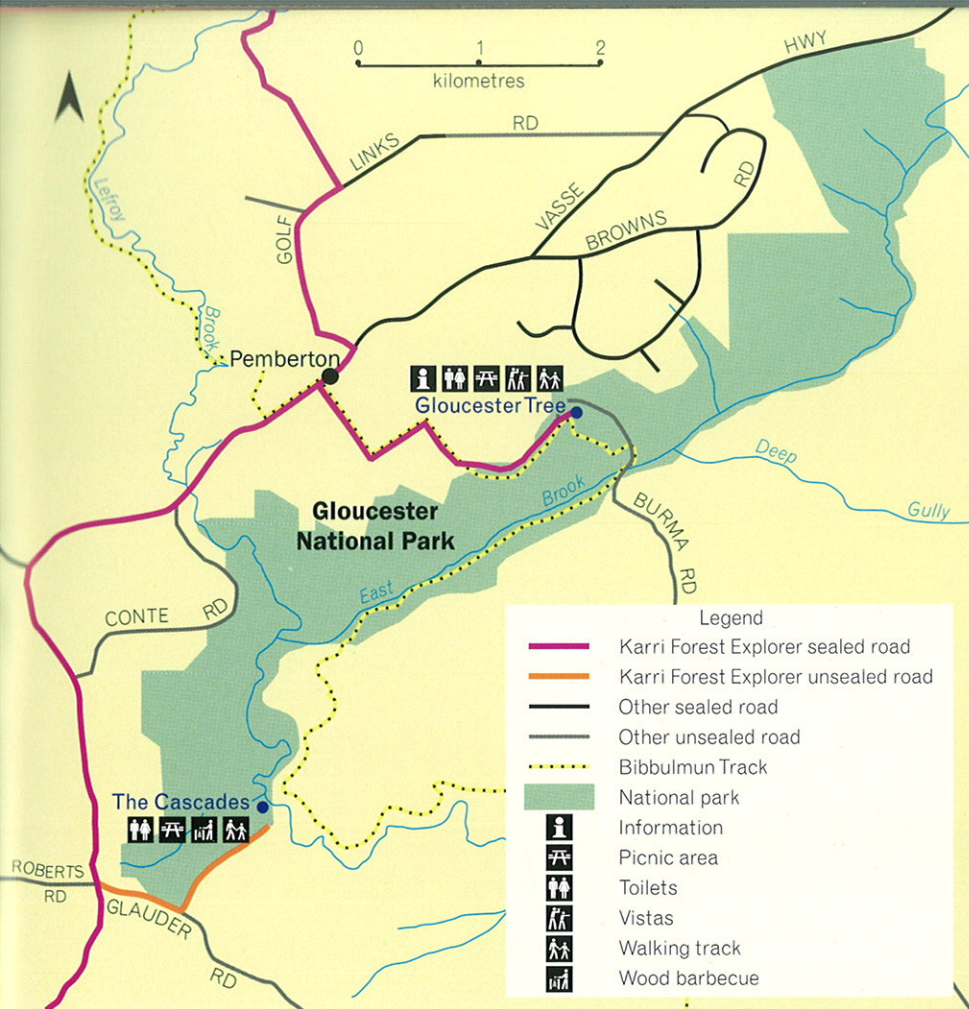
Exploring the karri forest

Gloucester National Park and the Gloucester Tree are feature attractions on the Karri Forest Explorer Drive. This tourist route winds through some of the south-west's most magnificent karri forest, also visiting the nearby Beedelup and Warren national parks. Trailside information guides visitors through the forest and a series of tourist radio stops provide information about the sites and the history of the region.

The karri (*Eucalyptus diversicolor*) grows up to 90 metres high, making

Above Gloucester National Park.
Photo – Gordon Roberts/DEC

Far right Gloucester Tree.
Photo – Jiri Lochman



it the tallest tree in WA and one of the tallest in the world. Karri forests are unique to the south-west of the State with the main belt growing south from Nannup to Manjimup to the Frankland River, then east to Denmark and Torbay, near Albany. While a karri reaches its full height at about 75 years old, they live up to 350 years.

The long, straight trunks of the karri have a smooth bark that is shed each year. As the bark matures, the outer layers change tones, creating a beautiful diversity of colours—shades of pink and orange, grey and white. Another impressive sight is the karri forest between late August and late October, when their white flowers are in bloom.

The karri forest can seem deceptively deserted as most of its native animals, such as the quenda (*Isoodon obesulus*), mardo (*Antechinus flavipes*) and dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*) kangaroos and possums, tend to come out in the cool of the evening and night. The karri tree crowns of Gloucester National Park are also home to owls, eagles, parrots and black cockatoos while within the protection of the understorey you might spot honeyeaters, wrens, fantails and robins.

Walks

A visit to Gloucester National Park would not be complete without seeing The Cascades at its southern end, where Lefroy Brook flows over a series of small rocky shelves. A 1.5-kilometre trail with foot bridges and boardwalks leads to the best viewing points during the 30-minute walk along the pretty brook's banks. The Cascades and their towering karri tree surrounds create a delightful picnic spot.

Walking is a popular way to enjoy the karri forest and there are a number of routes to be explored in the park. Gentle strolls include the 400-metre Duke's Walk and the 800-metre Karri Views. For longer walks, the three-kilometre Gloucester Tree walk will take you from the Pemberton township to the Gloucester Tree or try the 10-kilometre Gloucester Route loop that leads over hills and down gullies to hidden creeks and waterfalls. Another more adventurous walk is the 12-kilometre return from the Gloucester Tree to The Cascades, part of the Bibbulmun Track, which features Eastbrook Valley and stunning views of the karri forest. A tourism tramway which runs from Pemberton to The Cascades is another pleasant way to enjoy the forest.

park facts

Where is it? Gloucester National Park backs onto the town of Pemberton. The Gloucester Tree is about three kilometres from the township and The Cascades are about six kilometres away. Park fees apply in Gloucester National Park.

Total area: 878 hectares.

Naming: The Gloucester Tree lookout, and eventually the national park, were named after the Governor-General of Australia, His Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester, who was visiting Pemberton when the lookout was being built.

What to do: Bushwalking, fishing, picnicking, looking at wildflowers, tree climbing.

Must see sites: The Cascades at Lefroy Brook, the Gloucester Tree—look out for the brightly coloured western rosella parrots which are a feature of this site.

Facilities: Picnic tables, toilets, lookouts, barbecues at the Gloucester Tree and The Cascades.

Nearest DEC office: Donnelly District Office, Kennedy Street, Pemberton, phone (08) 9776 1207.

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