

feature park by Samille Mitchell

Windjana Gorge National Park

The spectacular walls of Windjana Gorge rise abruptly from the surrounding Lennard River flood plain, looming 100 metres high in some places. The 3.5-kilometre-long gorge cuts through the limestone of the Napier Range and is part of an ancient barrier reef that is also visible at Geikie Gorge and Tunnel Creek national parks.

In Windjana Gorge National Park, the Lennard River charges through the gorge during the wet season and forms pools embraced by shady trees and shrubs during the dry. In places, the pooled water mirrors the rock walls of the gorge towering high above.

History

The Bunuba people are the traditional owners of the Windjana Gorge area. The park earned its name from the Wandjina, an ancient mythological spirit of the Dreamtime; the current spelling arose from a mis-recording by William Forrester who took up nearby pastoral lease in 1884. The Bunuba people call the gorge Taley and occupied the area around the gorge for thousands of years—art sites, artefact scatters and mythological stories from the area are testament to this. At one place in the gorge, a large boulder, Bandigan Rock, sits in a pool of water in which the spirits of babies are said to be found.

In the late 1800s explorers and pastoralists arrived with their sheep and cattle, resulting in conflict with the land's traditional owners. Windjana Gorge was the site of one such conflict. For here, in 1894, a gun battle broke out between Bunuba freedom fighter Jandamarra and a party of 30 men revenging Jandamarra's attack on five cattlemen, three of whom were killed. Jandamarra was seriously wounded during the reprisal attack but survived the injury.

The national park was gazetted in 1971.

Natural attractions

Windjana Gorge was once part of a barrier reef that teemed with marine life. The reef formed 360 million years ago in the Devonian period when large parts of the Kimberley were covered by tropical seas. Fossils in the rocks at Windjana are world renowned for providing clues to this ancient epoch. Other fossils found in the area include a giant species of crocodile that grew



Opposite page
Main Windjana Gorge.
 Photo - Marie Lochman

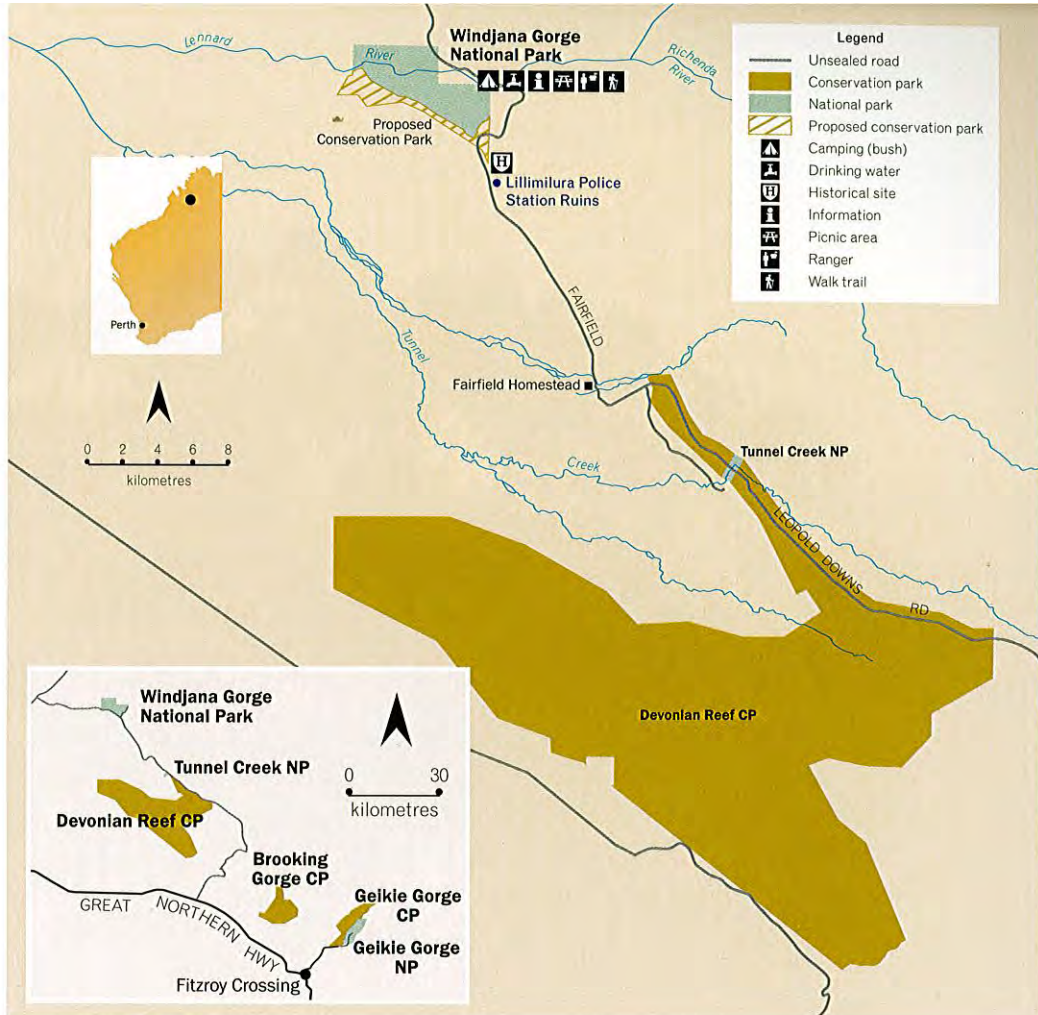
Top Little red flying fox.

Above Freshwater crocodiles can be spotted in the park.

Below right An iconic north-west species, the boab tree.
 Photos - Jiri Lochman

to about seven metres long and a giant wombat-like marsupial called a Diprotodon.

In the gorge, river gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and cadjeputs (*Melaleuca leucadendra*) fringe the banks of the Lennard River while spinifex adorns the plains and rock fig (*Ficus platypoda*) clings to the gorge walls. Boabs (*Adansonia gregorii*) and the coolaman tree (*Gyrocarpus americanus*) grow on the slopes of the gorge. Aboriginal people would use the smooth, shiny bark of the coolaman tree to make light containers for carrying possessions and cradling babies. Away from the gorge the vegetation is dramatically different with a savannah woodland of trees such as Kimberley bauhinia (*Bauhinia cunninghamii*), greybox (*E. tectifera*)



and twin-leaf bloodwood (*Corymbria cadophora*).

The riverine vegetation is home to colonies of fruit-bats such as the black flying fox (*Pteropus alecto*), as well as large flocks of raucous little corellas and waterbirds such as the black bittern and the rufous night-heron. The waters here are also regarded as one of the best places in the state to see freshwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus johnstoni*).

Peregrine falcons roost in the gorge walls and sandstone shrike-thrushes forage for insects in the crannies. Away from the gorge, you may see agile wallabies (*Macropus agilis*), recognised by their sandy colour and a light stripe down their cheek and thigh.

Exploring the park

During the wet season, the park is inaccessible and closed to the public. During the dry, you can set out on a range of walks including the Savannah Walk, Gorge Walk and Time Walk. The walks are well signposted with trailheads and trail markers present.

The ruins of the Lillimilura homestead are in the park and can be accessed via Fairfield Leopold Downs Road. The homestead was constructed from local limestone in 1884 for the

King Sound Pastoral Company. The homestead was also site of the police outpost where Aboriginal freedom fighter Jandamarra shot a police constable.

There is a day-use site at the car park to the gorge and a camping area with water, toilets, showers and fire rings. The park is open from April to November. Rangers are present to collect camp fees and provide information.

park facts

Where is it? 145 kilometres from Derby and 150 kilometres from Fitzroy Crossing.

Total area: 2,134 hectares.

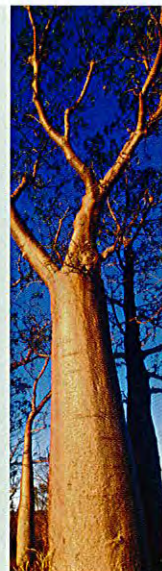
What to do: Camping, sightseeing, walking, photography, nature observation.

Facilities: Toilets, showers, water, information shelter, pay phone.

Camping: Camping is permitted in the park. Fees apply.

Park fees: Entry fees apply.

Nearest DEC office: West Kimberley District Office, 111 Herbert Street, Broome (08) 9195 5500.



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