

## Geikie Gorge National Park

Visitors to Geikie Gorge National Park in the west Kimberley can take a boat trip through the gorge or set out on one of several walk trails.

**Above** Geikie Gorge.  
*Photo - Jiri Lochman*

**Top right** White-bellied sea-eagle.  
*Photo - Dave Watts/Lochman*  
*Transparencies*

**Above right** Freshwater crocodile.  
*Photo - Damon Annison*

**Right** Little pied cormorant.  
*Photo - Jiri Lochman*

The floodwaters of the Fitzroy River have carved the 30-metre-deep Geikie Gorge through the limestone at the junction of the Oscar and Geikie ranges. The gorge is part an ancient barrier reef from the Devonian epoch rich in marine life. During the wet season, the Fitzroy River rises about 16.5 metres, staining the walls of the gorge and flooding the national park with seven metres of water. In the dry, between April and November, the river transforms into a quiet stream strung out beneath the towering cliffs of the ancient limestone reef. Here, layers of fossils and the limestone strata of the ancient reef are exposed in cross-section, showing glimpses of life in the Devonian period long before modern-day reptiles and mammals evolved.

### History

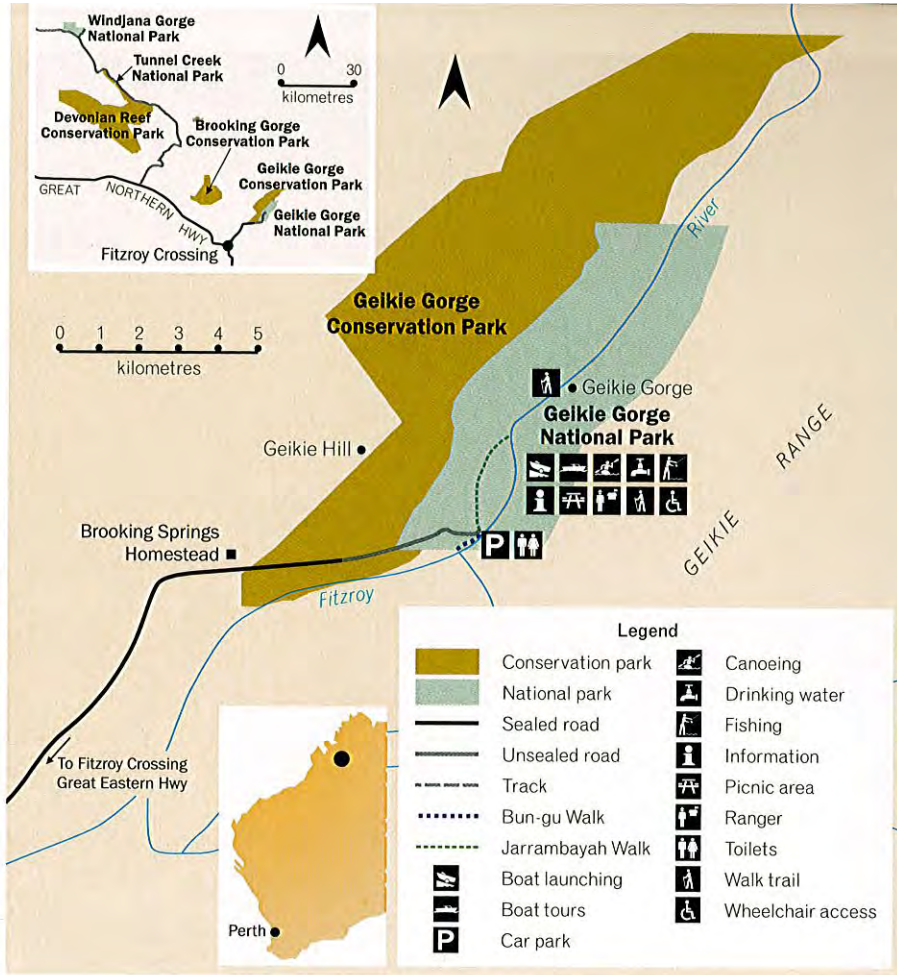
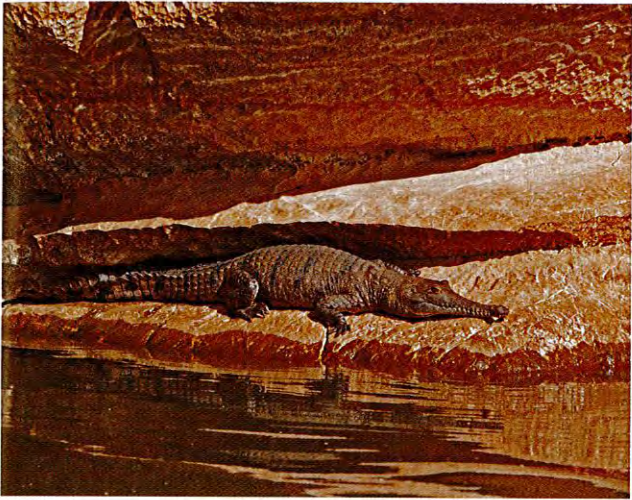
The traditional owners, the Bunuba, call the gorge Darngku. It's here that a blind Aboriginal elder drowned in the Dreaming, after leaving his tribe to go wandering. The old man sighed and

sneezed before he sank to the bottom for the last time. It's said his sighs can still be heard when the gorge is quiet.

The sandbar where the Mayalin or Margaret River meets the Fitzroy River is known as Bungku and was a traditional meeting place for the Bunuba and Goonlan people who came from the Fossil Downs area.

The Bunuba people also revere a site near the end of the western wall of the gorge as the place where fire was created. For here, in the days before the Bunuba people had fire, the old crocodile man Lullangarra resided, greedily keeping his firesticks to himself. One day the other animals plotted to steal the firesticks but no one was brave enough except Gid Gunya, 'the black kite man'. He dived down into the murky depths where Lullangarra lived and stole the sticks before changing into his bird form and setting the bush alight to produce fires for everyone to cook with. Even today, Gid Gunya, the black kite, can be seen wherever there are fires, maintaining the fires for everyone.





The park is named after Sir Archibald Geikie, a director general of the geological survey for Great Britain and Ireland.

It was gazetted as a national park in 1967.

### Natural attractions

The park's main feature is the striking rock formations of Geikie Gorge. The vegetation fringing the river in Geikie Gorge is dominated by two species of cadjeput or paperbarks, *Melaleuca leucadendra* and *M. argentea*, interspersed with river gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*), the cluster fig (*Ficus racemosa*), river fig (*F. coronulata*) and freshwater mangrove (*Barringtonia acutangulata*). Thickets of pandanus (*Pandanus aquaticus*) also occur along the river, providing a home for the threatened purple-crowned fairy-wren (*Malurus coronatus*).

The gorge's caves provide warm and humid resting places for the golden-furred orange leaf-nosed bat (*Rhinonictis aurantia*) while the short-eared rock wallaby (*Petrogale brachyotis*) lives near the gorge.

Geikie Gorge is also home to a big variety of birds including the darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), little pied

cormorant (*Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*) and egrets. You may also see two species not often found this far from the sea—the white-bellied sea-eagle (*Haliaeetus leucogaster*) and the brahminy kite (*Haliastur indus*). Look out for sandstone shrike-thrush (*Colluricincla woodwardi*) along the cliffs, while the restless flycatcher (*Myiagra inquieta*) and brush cuckoo (*Cacomantis variolosus*) frequent the forest. Freshwater crocodiles (*Crocodylus johnstoni*) live in the riverside waters of Geikie Gorge but are usually harmless if you leave them alone.

### Exploring the park

The Department of Environment and Conservation runs one-hour boat tours through Geikie Gorge in the dry season. The boat travels along the base of part of the 14-kilometre-long gorge, dwarfed by 40-metre-high walls of cliff face.

You can also set out on three walks in the park. The 800-metre-return Bun-gu Walk follows the Fitzroy River to the sandbar (bun-gu) marking the meeting place of the Margaret and Fitzroy rivers.

Upstream from the car park is the Jarrambayah (Reef) Walk—a three-kilometre-return walk along the banks

of the Fitzroy River floodplain to the west wall of Geikie Gorge. You'll pass limestone reef outcrops sculpted by seasonal flooding.

The one-kilometre-return Rarrgi Walk branches off Jarrambayah Walk.

Private boats and canoes can access the gorge in the dry season after 4.30pm.

**park facts**

**Where is it?** 20 kilometres from Fitzroy Crossing and 280 kilometres from Derby.

**Total area:** 3,136 hectares.

**What to do:** Boat tours, sightseeing, photography, walking, nature observation.

**Facilities:** Toilets, gas barbecues, tour boats, disabled access.

**Camping:** You can camp in privately operated facilities at nearby Fitzroy Crossing.

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



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