



King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park

With its stunning waterholes, spectacular waterfalls and impressive landscape, King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park is one of the jewels of the Kimberley.

Above Above the falls at Bell Gorge.
Photo – Marie Lochman

Opposite page

Top left Echidnas can be found in the park.

Above left Giant water lily (*Nymphaea violacea*).

Far right Sugar gliders are residents of King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park.
Photos – Jiri Lochman

King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park is located about 200 kilometres east of Derby or 450 kilometres west of Kununurra on the Gibb River Road on the south-western boundary of the Kimberley Plateau. It is open to visitors throughout the dry season—May to October—and attracts droves of people who come to appreciate the spectacular gorge scenery and the opportunity to explore and camp in a wilderness environment.

The King Leopold Ranges consists predominantly of sandstones and has been 560 million years in the making. The magnificent range is a crescent shape which snakes across the ancient landscape and rises up to 300 metres above the surrounding plain, with Mount Ord, its highest peak, at 947 metres.

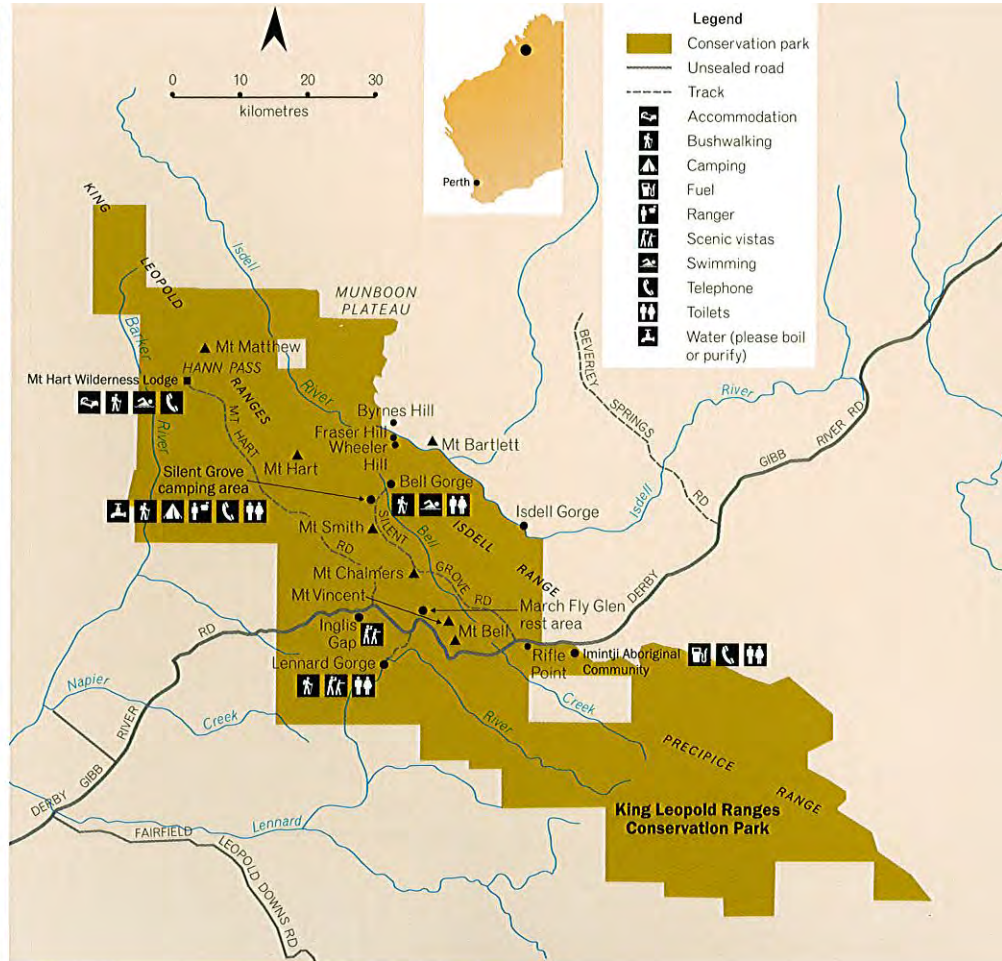
The original inhabitants called the range ‘Woonamur’ and it forms a natural border to the lands of the Bunuba, Ngarinyin, Wula and Wungemi Aboriginal people.

History

Aboriginal people believe the waterways, animals, plants and rocks were left for them by their ancestors, at the very beginning of time—the Dreamtime. They believe the Dreamtime guides how they should care for the land in order to keep the land, and themselves, alive.

In more recent history, expeditions in 1879 and 1905 were carried out in the area to collect plant specimens and to determine the suitability of the land for grazing. These expeditions were challenging, given the inhospitable terrain, and resulted in names such as ‘Devils Pass’ and ‘Mount Hopeless’ being given to features of the area.

Despite the challenges faced, a 370,000-hectare pastoral lease was taken up over the area which became known as Mount Hart Station in 1919. During the ensuing 70 years, pastoralists grazed cattle but ultimately the ruggedness of the landscape prevailed and the state government purchased the land for conservation in 1992 and declared it a conservation park in 2000.



Naturally stunning

The King Leopold Ranges features long ridges and impressive escarpments and is home to several rare and endemic plant species, including the rare cycad *Cycas fufuracea*, the wattle *Acacia gracillima* and the shrub *Solanum leopoldense*. Water lilies and aquatic plants fill permanent pools in creeks and rivers creating peaceful oases among the otherwise harsh spinifex plains. The park also features open savanna woodlands, isolated rainforest patches and groves of river gum (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*) and paperbark trees (*Melaleuca leucadendra*).

The park is also home to the echidna (*Tachyglossus aculeatus*), sugar glider (*Petaurus breviceps*), northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*), northern brown bandicoot (*Isodon macrourus*) and the rock ringtail possum (*Petropseudes dahli*). Fauna is particularly rich north of the Gibb River Road, where it is less impacted by former pastoral activity and there is higher rainfall. Bird life is also prolific. You may see threatened species such as the red goshawk (*Erythrotriorchis radiatus*), the Gouldian finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*) and the purple-crowned fairy-wren (*Malurus coronatus*).

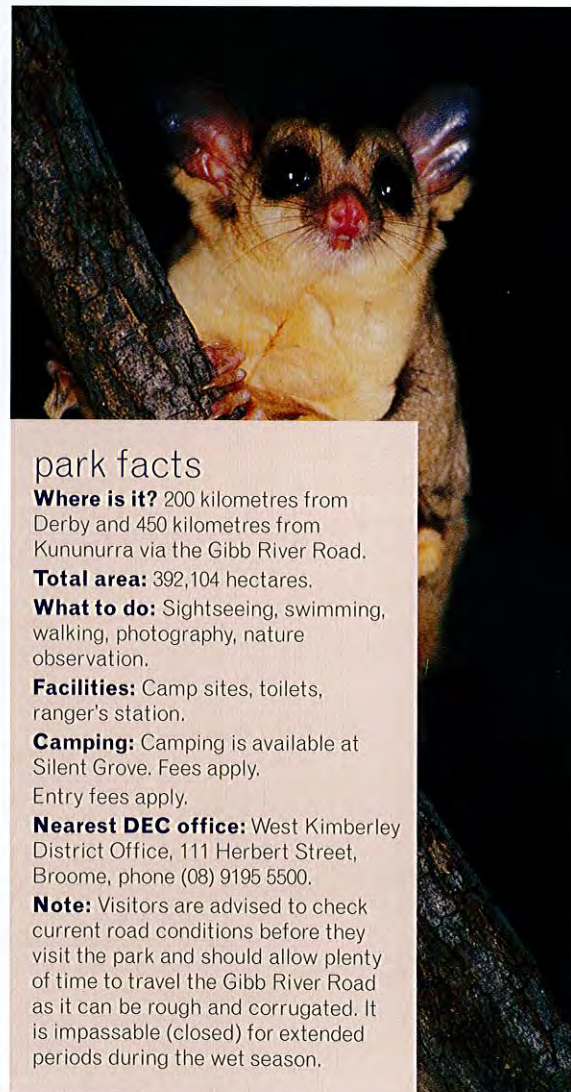
As few studies have been carried out in the park, the true extent of plants and animals that occur here is unknown.

Scene to be believed

In addition to the ranges, the park is famed for the Bell and Lennard gorges. Bell Gorge, and its waterfalls, is among the most spectacular in the Kimberley. A steep and rocky walk winds high above the falls but provides spectacular views and leads to a plunge pool which offers relaxing swimming opportunities at the bottom of a 35-metre cascading waterfall.

Camping and accommodation

King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park features a campground at Silent Grove—named after the outstation that once stood there—which campers use to make day visits to Bell Gorge. Here there is a ranger's station as well as toilets and solar showers. Silent Grove is accessible only by four-wheel-drive vehicles. Accommodation is also available at the privately run Mount Hart Wilderness Lodge and campground, where guests can swim, bushwalk and bird watch.



park facts

Where is it? 200 kilometres from Derby and 450 kilometres from Kununurra via the Gibb River Road.

Total area: 392,104 hectares.

What to do: Sightseeing, swimming, walking, photography, nature observation.

Facilities: Camp sites, toilets, ranger's station.

Camping: Camping is available at Silent Grove. Fees apply. Entry fees apply.

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

Note: Visitors are advised to check current road conditions before they visit the park and should allow plenty of time to travel the Gibb River Road as it can be rough and corrugated. It is impassable (closed) for extended periods during the wet season.

43 Eradicating cats and black rats from Christmas Island

These introduced pests on Christmas Island are becoming a thing of the past thanks to a community-based program.

48 Pellitory projects: chances for a butterfly

Native pellitory is making a reappearance at sites around Perth and is providing important breeding and feeding places for the yellow admiral butterfly.

56 Avon Wheatbelt lichens

A somewhat hidden world exists in the Avon Wheatbelt, unless you know what to look for.

Regulars

3 Contributors and Editor's letter

17 Bookmarks

Australia's Granite Wonderlands: Rock of Ages' Intriguing Landscapes and Life
A Field Guide to the Eremophilas of Western Australia
Deadly Beautiful: Vanishing killers of the animal kingdom

22 Feature park

King Leopold Ranges Conservation Park

55 Endangered

Sunset frog

62 Urban Antics

Water 'bout it

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