



Canoeing Kalbarri National Park

Samille Mitchell discovers a canoe tour is an excellent way to experience the beauty of Kalbarri National Park's river gorges, and gain access to little-visited parts of the park.

We're on the move, trekking down a scrambly path through dry shrubland bush. Ahead, a family banter about their lack of fitness, the girls teasing their dad for being too slow and their brother for wearing thongs on a hike, and behind I hear a kid whine, "how much further?" But, as we take a turn and the river gorges of Kalbarri National Park open

up before us, we all fall momentarily quiet. Struck by the beauty, we take a collective gasp. For out of the scrub an expanse of gorge appears before us, a rust-red cliff looming skyward, the Murchison River flowing along its base and gnarled gums overhanging the waters.

Our guide beckons us further on, across sun-bleached boulders and, finally, we reach a beach more typical of the tropics than the semi-arid environs of Kalbarri National Park. Nearby a stand of river gums shade picnic tables, and fresh water seeps through the cliff overhang above creating a deliciously cool micro-climate. It has the feel of an oasis in the desert. And it's where we'll base ourselves for our canoe tour of the Murchison River gorge.

guide Helen Waite leads us on foot down a track to the hidden gorge. Here, we team up into pairs and climb aboard the canoes to set off on a three-kilometre paddle up and back. It's when the canoes begin to spread out that we begin to fully appreciate the beauty around us: the silence, the way the breeze occasionally ruffles the otherwise mirror-like water, a pair of eagles floating on the warm air above. Helen says canoeists are often treated to the sight of up to 50 black swans that visit every year, and she points out where whistling kites have built a nest in a tree overhanging the water. But it's the gorge walls that are most captivating. You only need to look at them to guess that they're old—really old. They have been worn and weathered by the storms of time in a process spanning 420 million years (see 'Captivating Kalbarri', *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 2010).

Above Trekking down to the Murchison River.

Photo – Samille Mitchell

Above left Whistling kites can be seen in trees overhanging the water.

Photo – Jiri Lochman

Opposite page

Top The Murchison River gorge provides a picturesque location for canoeing.

Left Taking in the tranquil surrounds.

Right Canoeists are dwarfed by the ancient gorge walls.

Photos – Samille Mitchell

NATURE'S BOUNTY

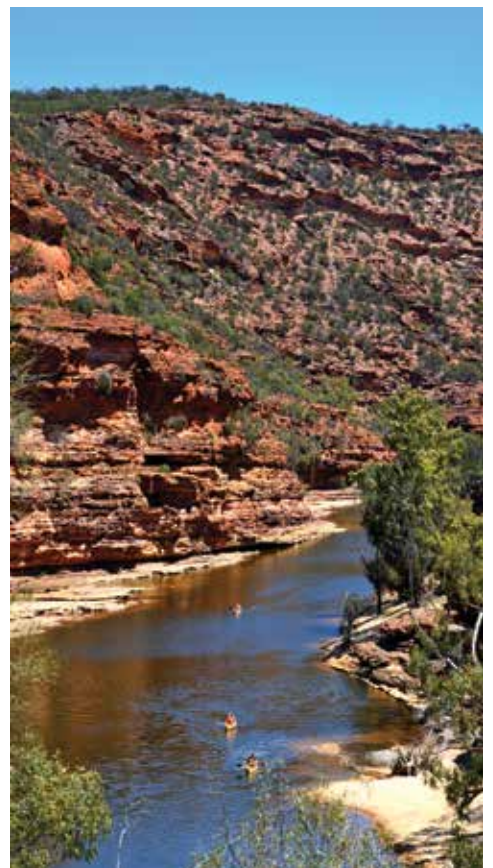
Kalbarri Adventure Tours has been in the game for 16 years, transferring participants to Kalbarri National Park in a four-wheel drive bus well designed for the bone-jarring track off the main gorge route to the canoe site. Stopping the bus seemingly nowhere, our

AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE

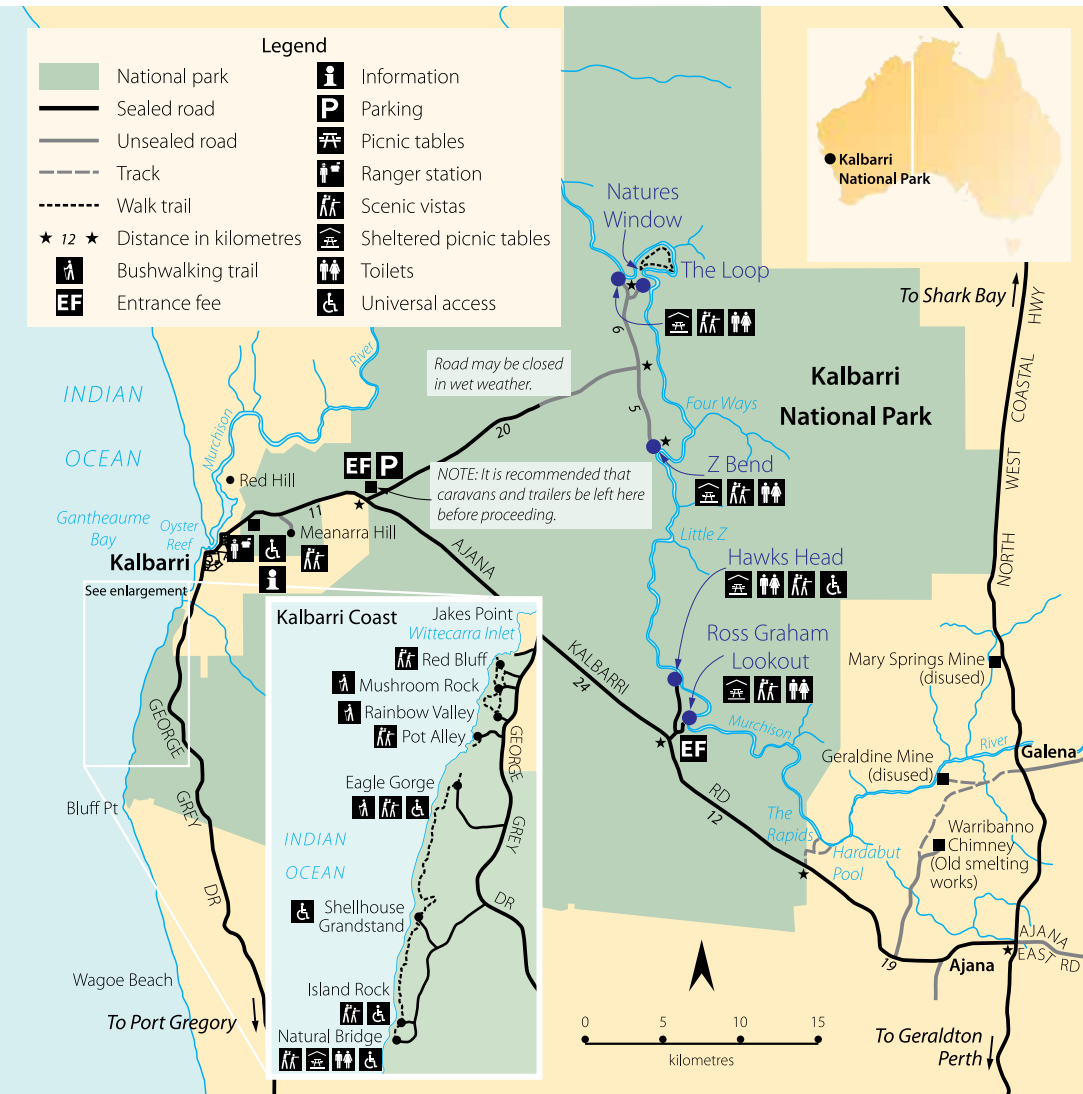
Apparently this process began when the area that is now Kalbarri was part of a gigantic river system that discharged into a shallow sea. Then, more than 200 million



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Parks for people Canoeing Kalbarri National Park



Above Cooling down in the Murchison River.
Photo – Samille Mitchell

Do it yourself

Where is it? River gorge recreation sites in Kalbarri National Park are about 35 kilometres east of Kalbarri. Kalbarri is about 650 kilometres north of Perth.

When to visit? The gorge can be extremely hot in summer so time your visit for autumn, winter or spring.

Please note, drinking water is not available in the park. To avoid dehydration drink three to four litres when walking.

For more information, and to make bookings, contact the Kalbarri Visitor Centre on (08) 9937 1104 or visit www.kalbarri.org.au/tours.

Park fees apply at Kalbarri National Park. To purchase a national parks pass, visit the Kalbarri Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW) office, DPaW's online shop at www.shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au or the Kalbarri Visitor Centre. You can find more information about Kalbarri National Park in the department's stunning publication *Kalbarri*, sold where you can buy park passes and from good bookshops.

Parks for people is one of LANDSCOPE's many regular features. It features information about some of WA's great national parks and other reserves and the amazing ways to experience them.

years ago, wind and floodwater shifted sand from an area known as the Yilgarn Block into the Kalbarri area. More recently, between 65 million and 1.6 million years ago, the Murchison River began to flow through the landscape carving out a path that revealed the sedimentary formation lain here all those years ago and sculpting the spectacular gorges of today.

While it's fascinating to learn of the geology, you can still appreciate the gorge's ancient nature without this knowledge. It's almost as if the gorge itself speaks to you, in its stark outlines, crumbling rock and even, perhaps, through the whisper of the wind. I'm getting a little lost in whimsy when a hoot of laughter sounds out nearby and someone leaps from their canoe into the water. Jerked out of my daydream, we pull the canoes onto the beach and join the swimmer. It's the ideal

refresher before lunch—we bring our own—and cake, a scrumptious creation from a tour guide who is just as well known in Kalbarri for her baking prowess as her tour-guiding abilities.

Still wet from the swim we pack up and head out on a different route—up a crevice that has us huffing and puffing and using the excuse to stop and admire the view. While enough to make you sweat, the climb out is not too strenuous. Helen says she's had people of all ages—from toddlers to 80 years—on the tour. She says anyone with a sense of adventure enjoys the experience.

"They love being outdoors, in this amazingly beautiful area, doing some exercise, learning a bit about nature, and just taking in the scenery," she says. "And we usually find we have a good laugh while we're at it."