



Rediscovering Fitzgerald River National Park

Fitzgerald River National Park – one of the largest and most significant national parks in Australia for its unique plants and animals – has recently undergone a \$40-million upgrade to roads and visitor facilities. The result: world-class facilities in an amazingly scenic and ecologically diverse environment.

by Peter Hartley



Boasting an area of nearly 300,000ha on Western Australia's stunning central south coast, Fitzgerald River National Park stretches between Bremer Bay and Hopetoun, 420km south-east of Perth. The park features spectacular and diverse landscapes, from rolling plains to colourful breakaways, and rugged peaks and headlands to stunning bays and inlets. Its beauty is multi-dimensional – occurring at a landscape and species level. In fact, Fitzgerald River National Park contains about 20 per cent of the State's described plant species with 1883 plant species identified, of which 75 are found nowhere else in the world.

Wildflowers are on display all year-round but are particularly spectacular from August to November. In addition, more species of native animals live in the national park than in any other reserve in south-western Australia, including 22 mammals, 41 reptiles and 12 frogs. The park also has more than 200 bird species including the rare and elusive western ground parrot (see 'The secret life of the western ground parrot', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 2005), the western bristle bird and the western whipbird. During winter, southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) delight park visitors when they come close to shore to give birth and shelter their newborn calves. Dolphins, seals and migrating humpback whales (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) can also be seen along the coast.



With such richness comes responsibility to manage the area and its important plants and animals for the future while providing opportunities for people to access, experience and enjoy the park and its beautiful features. In fact, the park is recognised internationally as a biosphere reserve under the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) *Man and the Biosphere Programme*, which aims to discover and demonstrate how people and nature can flourish together in a sustainable way.

GETTING A FACELIFT

The Fitzgerald River National Park Improvement Project was launched in 2008 in response to the closure of the BHP Billiton mine in Ravensthorpe. The initiative provided \$40 million of State and

Commonwealth funding to upgrade road access to the park and improve camping facilities, recreation sites and walking trails. Its aim is to increase tourism to the area and generate associated economic benefits to the surrounding shires while providing practical and environmentally sensitive infrastructure so people can visit and enjoy the park while protecting the natural environment.

DRIVE THROUGH

A major part of the project was the upgrade of 70km of roads, of which 34km were bitumen sealed on the eastern side to provide all-weather public access to the park. The sealed road from Hopetoun to Hamersley Inlet provides visitors with a guaranteed opportunity to have a scenic drive along the rugged 'Fitz' coast and incredible views into the heart of the park's wilderness zone. This road also serves as a main arterial to access a number of recently completed recreational sites and campgrounds.

Great care was taken during the road construction to prevent the spread of dieback (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) into the park (see 'Dieback' on page 32). This was achieved through extensive planning and strict, and at times gruelling, management

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Main Quoin Head.
Photo – Damon Annison

Left Western bristlebirds are one of 200 bird species found in the park.
Photo – David Bettini



Above Fishing from the rocks at Point Ann.
Photo – Sallyanne Cousans

Above right Interpretation panel at Barrens Beach.
Photo – Jiri Lochman



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protocols and monitoring regimes. Gravel roads on the western side of the park have been upgraded but, due to dieback risk, will still be closed during wet periods.

CAMPGROUND AND PICNIC AREAS

Several picnic areas and two campgrounds have been revamped, providing visitors with world-class facilities from which to enjoy and appreciate the park.

The newly developed Hamersley Inlet visitor precinct lies in a deep winding valley and provides a great habitat for wildlife viewing, especially birds, which flourish within the estuarine and surrounding woodland environment. The Hamersley Inlet campground is managed by the Ravensthorpe Shire and provides 14 camp ‘pods’ (three large, eight medium and three small), toilets and a camp kitchen. For the first time in the park’s history, sites for small caravans and campervans have

also been provided. For those not planning to stay overnight, there is a new site that provides a terraced picnic area and picnic shelter, toilets, free gas barbecues and interpretation panels. Visitors can fish for black bream, kayak in the inlet, or explore the edge of the inlet by foot where they might see spotted minnow or Swan River goby in the shallows. This site is also one of three trailheads for the Hakea Walking Trail.

Four Mile Beach campground has also undergone an extensive upgrade, with 15 newly developed camp sites that are set into the bush to maximise privacy and provide protection from the wind, creating a true sense of being one with nature. There are also new universal access toilets with an adjacent change or shower room and barbecues for cooking in two distinct eating areas – a smaller private one and a larger shared one. Four Mile Beach is the perfect place to camp to explore the newly developed Barrens

precinct, which also includes two new picnic areas at Four Mile Beach and Barrens Beach. The area at Four Mile Beach has been redeveloped to cater to short picnic stops with sheltered picnic benches and a gas barbecue provided. Barrens Beach, to the west, boasts an educational and interpretation display amid contemporary artwork featuring a representation of the park’s mountain ranges and concrete stencilling of the park’s coastline. The universally accessible path to the educational areas and beach includes interpretive panels mounted on structures featuring cut-outs of the park’s flora and fauna. A new toilet facility and two sheltered picnic tables are available for visitors to Barrens Beach.

Further west, the Cave Point Peninsula has been adorned with a spectacular stainless steel lookout structure which leans out over the cliff, giving visitors an uninterrupted view out to the ocean and down to the sea-cut



Dieback

Dieback is caused by a water mould, known as *Phytophthora*, which is lethal to hundreds of plant species. The introduced water mould kills plants by destroying their root systems, and places many of the park's plant species at risk. The climate of the south coast favours the spread of dieback, which thrives in warm, moist soil and can easily be spread in mud or soil that adheres to vehicle tyres or bush walkers' footwear.

Fitzgerald River National Park is one of the parks least affected by dieback in south-western Australia. As such, Parks and Wildlife continually monitors for dieback in the park and undertakes necessary road and track closures in certain areas to prevent its spread. Visitors also play an important role. Bush walkers should clean soil and mud from their boots before entering the park or at the boot-cleaning stations provided at the trailhead sites in the park. It is also essential to wash car tyres and underbodies, keep to established roads and tracks and obey all road closure signs.

Above left Cave Point Lookout.

Left West Mount Barren summit.
Photos – Parks and Wildlife



caves below. A universal access toilet has been built adjacent to the car park at Cave Point. A kilometre to the west of Cave Point is the recently transformed visitor area at West Beach. Both Cave Point and West Beach are trailheads for the Hakea Walking Trail.

On the park's western side, visitor facilities at Point Ann have been upgraded with three new picnic areas and a new path network down to the beach.

TAKE A WALK

For those wanting to explore the park on foot, two new Class 4 walk trails (which require a good level of fitness, a map, sturdy walking boots, suitable

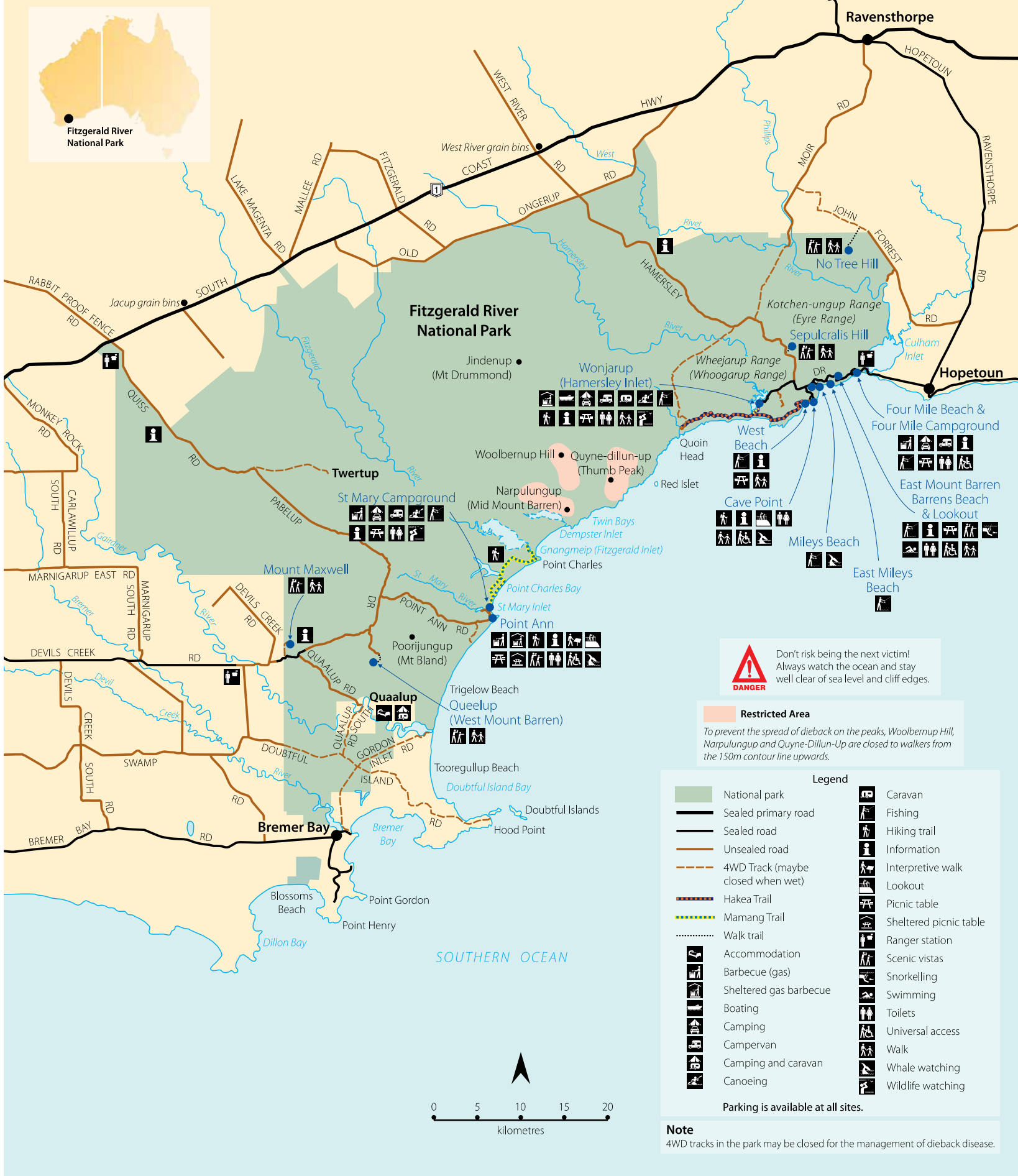
clothing, first aid kit, sun protection and plenty of water) have been developed in the park.


The Mamang Trail gets its name from the Noongar word for whale, which you may see when the southern right whales come close to shore to birth and raise their young or when migrating humpback, minke (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) or orca (*Orcinus orca*) whales pass on their way north from Antarctica. The 15.5km trail (or 31km return, usually done over two days) follows the spectacular park coastline between Point Ann and Fitzgerald Inlet. The trail offers options for easier half-day walks as well as full-day and overnight treks. Specially designed

viewpoints with expansive views of the coast, inland peaks, river valleys and inlets give walkers the opportunity to stop and take in the magnificent views to as far as the Doubtful Islands near Bremer Bay to the south, to East Mt Barren in the far north-west, and with the Hopetoun coastline in the distance beyond. Starting in the Point Ann car park – the southern end of WA's No 2 Rabbit-Proof Fence – the trail follows the coast along sandy beaches, across vegetated dunes and rocky ridges. There are several stops along the trail that have views of the coast, inland peaks, river valleys and inlets as well as the land-locked Lake Nameless. Rest areas with seats or platforms and



Fitzgerald River National Park



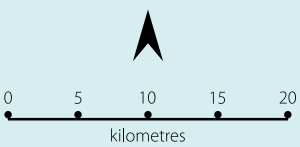
 Don't risk being the next victim! Always watch the ocean and stay well clear of sea level and cliff edges.

Restricted Area
To prevent the spread of dieback on the peaks, Woolbernap Hill, Narpulungup and Quyne-Dillun-Up are closed to walkers from the 150m contour line upwards.

Legend	
	National park
	Sealed primary road
	Sealed road
	Unsealed road
	4WD Track (maybe closed when wet)
	Hakea Trail
	Mamang Trail
	Walk trail
	Accommodation
	Barbecue (gas)
	Sheltered gas barbecue
	Boating
	Camping
	Campervan
	Camping and caravan
	Canoeing
	Caravan
	Fishing
	Hiking trail
	Information
	Interpretive walk
	Lookout
	Picnic table
	Sheltered picnic table
	Ranger station
	Scenic vistas
	Snorkelling
	Swimming
	Toilets
	Universal access
	Walk
	Whale watching
	Wildlife watching

Parking is available at all sites.

Note
4WD tracks in the park may be closed for the management of dieback disease.





interpretation are dotted along the way to give walkers the opportunity to stop, rest their legs and enjoy the views.

The Hakea Trail is a spectacular, sometimes rugged, 23km (46km return) walk along the eastern coastline from Cave Point to Quoin Head. This walk is named after one of the plant genera found in the park including the iconic royal hakea (*Hakea victoria*), which can be seen growing along the track. The trail journeys along the product of billions of years of geological history, including a unique section of limestone karst cliff lines, and alternates between ancient wave-cut platforms and much more recently formed beaches. The vast variations in geology have resulted in different soil types that lead to variations in the vegetation and associated fauna. As with the Mamang Trail, there are shorter alternatives to the Hakea Trail as well as a number of short walks on both the eastern and western side of the park. Both trails provide for overnight camping, so if you plan to stay out on the trails, remember to bring your pack, tent, cooking and sleeping gear and advise someone of your plans. As part of the project, Parks and Wildlife has produced visitor brochures for the Mamang Walk Trail and the Hakea Walk Trail and for short walks in the west and east of the park.



Top Woolly bush and royal hakea fringe the coastline.

Above left A whale-watching platform at Point Ann.
Photos – Sallyanne Cousans

Above right Descending from Royal Hakea Lookout.

Below right All trails in Fitzgerald River National Park are marked by these trail markers.
Photos – John Watson

Peter Hartley is the Parks and Wildlife South Coast Region parks and visitor services regional leader. He can be contacted on (08) 9842 4518 or by email (peter.hartley@dpaw.wa.gov.au).

Park entry and daily camping fees apply at Fitzgerald River National Park and can be paid at the ranger's stations. Park passes can be bought at Parks and Wildlife offices:

Department of Parks and Wildlife,
Albany District Office 120 Albany Highway
Albany WA 6330, phone: (08) 9842 4500, fax: (08) 9841 7105,
email: Albany@dpaw.wa.gov.au, or online at shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au.

