



Karijini National Park

Set in the heart of the Pilbara, Karijini National Park is famed for its red earth, sweeping plains, ancient geology and magnificent gorges. It is one of those places that you have to visit to truly appreciate its beauty but there's a lot more about this fascinating area than meets the eye.

Karijini National Park attracts nearly 200,000 visits a year, and it's not hard to see why. As Western Australia's second largest national park, it is vast in size and diversity. Its remarkable landscape changes dramatically from season to season and has evolved over millions of years.

AN ANCIENT HISTORY

The banded iron formations that are exposed in many of the rocks in and around the gorges date back to more than 2500 million years ago when they were fine-grained sediment on an ancient seafloor. At this time, the conditions of Earth were markedly different; the atmosphere contained much less oxygen and supported only simple bacteria. Over millions of years these deposits were transformed by the enormous pressure of sediments deposited over them, which forced trapped water out. The sediments were eventually turned

into tough, well-bedded rock. Then, lateral compression caused the rocks to buckle and develop vertical cracks. A sharp drop in the sea level created sheer-sided gorges as rivers cut through the land. This, combined with millions of years of erosion, has sculpted the landscape that we see today.

EXPLORING THE PARK

Karijini National Park is best visited in late autumn, winter and early spring. Winter days are warm and clear, but the nights are cold and sometimes frosty. Summer can bring thunderstorms and cyclones which can produce spectacular water flows in the gorges and even flash flooding. At this time of year temperatures frequently exceed 40°C.

Much of the south of the park is inaccessible, but the public recreation areas in the northern part of the park offer a number of amazing spots to explore. The

"Its remarkable landscape changes dramatically from season to season and has evolved over millions of years."

Karijini Visitor Centre, located in the centre of the park, was designed to blend in with the surrounding landscape, and contains a wealth of information. It is an ideal point from which to begin exploring the park.

Hamersley Gorge, in the park's north-west, has been the subject of a \$1.95 million upgrade thanks to the *Parks for People* initiative, through funding from *Royalties for Regions*, Parks and Wildlife capital funds and a contribution from Rio Tinto. New parking bays, sealed roads and toilets cater to the visitors who journey there to discover this beautiful spot. Here, a 400-metre-long

TRAIL CLASSIFICATIONS



Class 2

These walks are well defined with some steps and generally gradients are gentle.



Class 3

These trails are defined and may include steps; loose surfaces; and uneven ground; and short, steep sections. These walks are suitable for most people.



Class 4

These trails are moderately difficult. A good level of fitness. Expect steep gradients and natural obstacles including rocks and shallow pools.



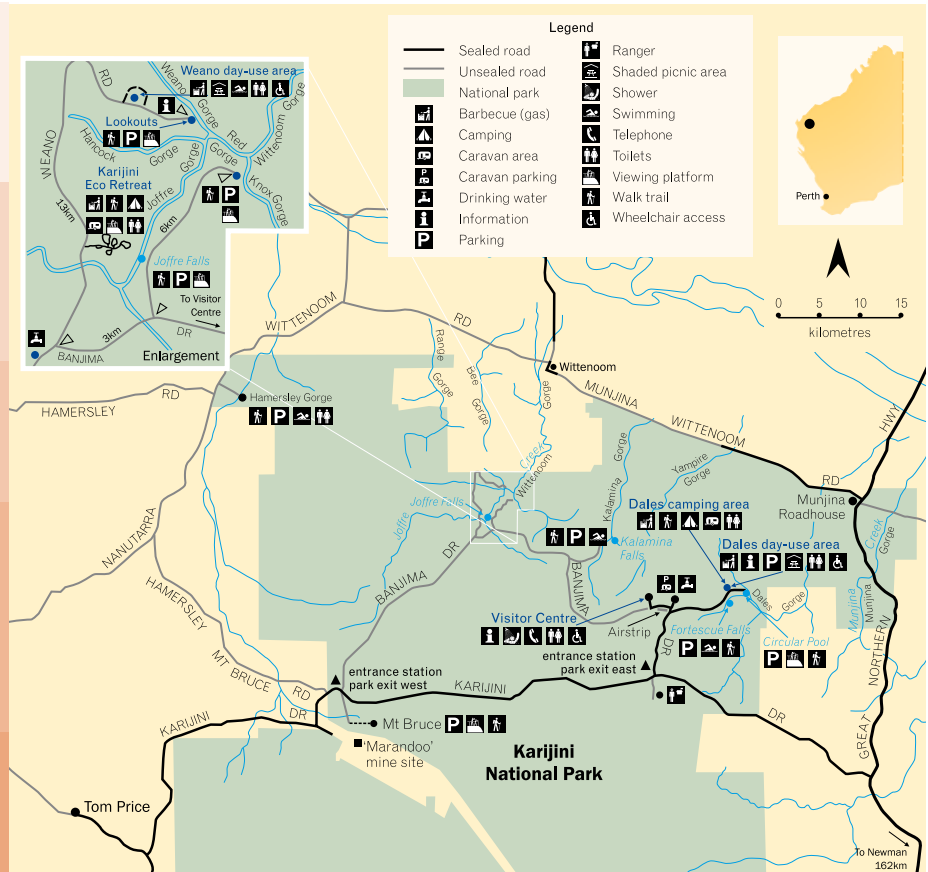
Class 5

These trails are for very experienced bushwalkers. A high level of fitness and agility is required. Trail markings are minimal, and steep sections with vertical drops are common. Expect to encounter natural hazards including large boulders; pools of water; slippery, wet rocks; and narrow, high ledges.



Warning

Flash floods can occur at Karijini National Park. If it rains while you are in the gorges, please leave the gorges safely and promptly.



Opposite page

Main The imposing Mount Bruce can be seen from the western park entrance.

Photo – Damon Annison

Right New facilities at Hamersley Gorge provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the spectacular view.

Photo – Parks and Wildlife

Class 3 walk trail takes about an hour for a return trip and guides visitors through the ever-changing light and astonishing colours to the Hamersley waterfall where water rushes into tranquil pools. Once back out of the gorge, visitors can stop to enjoy the scenery, and learn about the story of this fascinating landscape through updated information and interpretation panels.

East of Hamersley Gorge is the Weano recreation area. This is a great base from which to explore the many gorges of the area and witness the true power of the water that has shaped this landscape over millions of years.



Nearby is where Weano, Hancock, Red and Knox gorges converge in a spectacular fashion. You can view this phenomenon at Oxer Lookout and down some 120m to the waters at the gorge's base. At Weano Gorge you can journey to Handrail Pool – a popular swimming spot and a reward for the Class 5 climb down. Facilities in the Weano Gorge area include toilets, barbecues, picnic shelters and car parks.

There is also the nearby Karijini Eco Retreat, which offers affordable accommodation with the option of deluxe 'glamping', and a restaurant which serves cold drinks, breakfast, lunches and dinners.

The 100m walk to Joffre Lookout gives you a view across this spectacular curved waterfall, which forms a natural amphitheatre. You can access Knox Lookout via a 300m walk which provides spectacular

vistas to the horizon that change colours depending on the time of day. There are also Class 5 walks in these two gorges which, while immensely rewarding, are not for the faint-hearted. Seasoned hikers are also catered for at the 3km Class 4 Kalamina Gorge walk, which winds along the gorge downstream and along the lemon-scented grass beside the stream to Rock Arch Pool.

Further east, Dales Gorge is home to tranquil sunken gardens and deep sedge-fringed pools, such as Circular Pool where the water reflects the colours of the vegetation that lines its banks. It is also the site of permanent spring-fed waterfalls. The perhaps unexpected abundance of ferns around the gorges is caused by water that trickles through underground aquifers through the rocks. This is particularly obvious at Fern Pool, accessible by an 800m

.....
Above right Scrambling at Hancock Gorge.
Photo – Damon Annison

Below Termite mounds dot the landscape.
Photo – Andrew McInnes



walk down to the Fortescue Falls, and then a short continued walk upstream.

NATURAL INHABITANTS

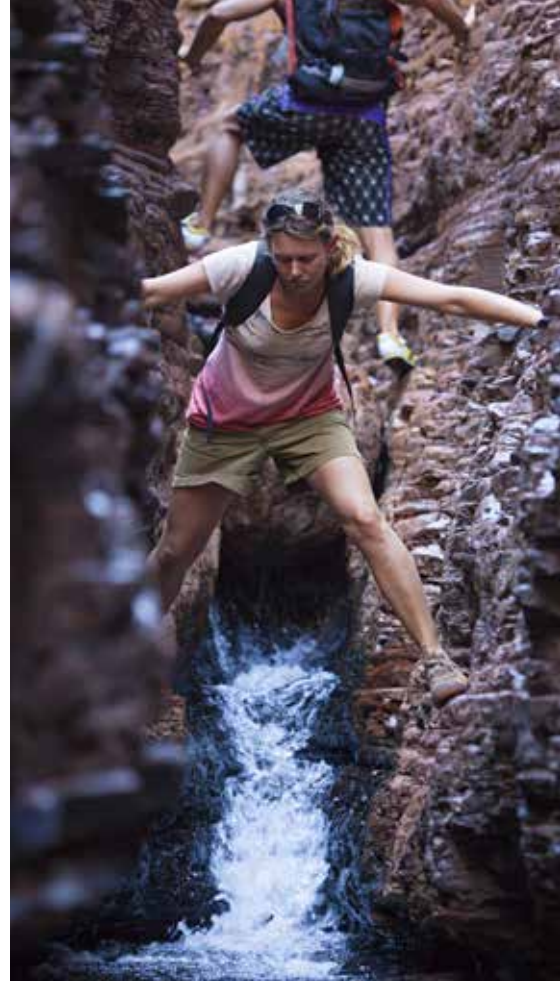
Despite its rugged aridness, Karijini National Park accommodates a variety of ecosystems. The quintessential impression of Karijini is low spinifex tussocks that cover the plains, which are dotted with lone snappy gums with their white trunks that appear to glow. But wildflowers abound after rains and yellow-flowering cassias and wattles, bluebells and mulla-mullas that transform the landscape.

Many native animals live in Karijini National Park, including red kangaroos (*Macropus rufus*), euros (*M. robustus*), Rothschild's rock-wallabies (*Petrogale rothschildi*), dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*) and bats. Native rodents and marsupial carnivores, such as the Pilbara ningui (*Ningui timealeyi*) can also be found. And you may even spot some of the park's frogs, geckoes, goannas, dragons, legless lizards, pythons and other snakes. The homes of two fascinating creatures – the termite and pebble mound mouse (*Pseudomys chapmani*) – add to the intrigue of the park with their curious structures dotting the landscape.

TIES TO COUNTRY

The Banyjima, Kurrama and Innawonga Aboriginal people are believed to have lived in the area for as many as 30,000 years and, in 1991, the park's name was changed from Hamersley Range National Park to 'Karijini' to reflect these cultural ties. Fern and Circular pools are among many places in the park that are special to local Aboriginal people. Visitors are asked to avoid making loud noises in these areas to help protect these heritage and cultural values.

No doubt you'll be cleaning the red dirt off your shoes for a while after your visit to Karijini National Park and the impressions of its rugged beauty will certainly stay with you for ages. It's hard not to be humbled when you're standing among million-year-old formations that completely dwarf you in size, and surely it's near impossible not to be awed by the natural processes that have taken place here.



Do it yourself

Where is it? Karijini is 310km from Roebourne and 285km from Port Hedland.

Total area: 627,441ha.

What to do: Camping, sightseeing, walking, swimming.

Facilities: Visitor centre, camping, accommodation, restaurant, toilets, car parks, water, gas barbecues.

Nearest Parks and Wildlife office: Pilbara Regional Office, Anderson Road, Karratha Industrial Estate, Karratha.
Phone: (08) 9182 2000.

Visit parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au for more information.

Warning: Flash floods do occur; please pay attention to all warning signs. Do not enter the gorges if there is significant rain in the area. If you take any of the walks please do so with care and only attempt walks that you have the experience and appropriate equipment for.

