

Adventure out

DESCENDING THE GIANTS

Recent visitors to the Tree Top Walk have been treated to an opportunity to experience the giant tingle trees and karri forest from a different perspective.

by Julie Ross



Harnessed up and with my safety helmet fitted, I take a deep breath and lift myself up over the railings. I'm nine metres high in the magnificent tingle forest at the Valley of the Giants and am about to abseil down to the forest floor. My hands are shaking and my heart is pumping, courtesy of the adrenalin 'hit' I'm experiencing. I've had a briefing and double checked my equipment, but I am still nervous. I realise I am as ready as I'll ever be, and am keen to get on with it before I lose my nerve and my colleagues discover I've chickened out!

So, I tackle my fear head on and go out on a limb – it is the forest, after all. Once I begin to lower myself down, I start to enjoy the experience. The feeling of 'falling' is exhilarating, but it's also reassuring knowing that I can control the speed at which I go. The smell of the karri and tingle trees and the sounds of the forest (including the cheers of those on the platform above) add to the experience. And it's amazing to get a different perspective of the tingle forest, which I have walked through so many times before.

After a few minutes my feet touch the soft forest floor. I'm glad to have reached the bottom and am quietly proud that I have done it.

Left At its height the Tree Top Walk platform is 40m above the forest floor.

Photo – Nic Duncan/Parks and Wildlife

Below Stephanie Crawford of Denmark on her first attempt at abseiling.

Photo – Parks and Wildlife



NEW TAKE ON AN OLD FAVOURITE

Located between Denmark and Walpole in Walpole-Nornalup National Park, in the heart of the Walpole Wilderness, the Tree Top Walk is an internationally renowned, award-winning nature-based attraction. Since opening in 1996, it has welcomed more than three million visitors who have been treated to breathtaking views across the wilderness along the stunning walkway which transverse through the forest canopy.

The 600m walk reaches 40m at its highest point in the tingle forest canopy and is fully accessible and suitable for children of all ages, wheelchairs and strollers. For some, being that high is adventure enough. But as the popularity of 'soft adventure' experiences grows, an opportunity to provide a more challenging way to experience the Tree Top Walk arose. In December 2014 a partnership began between Parks and Wildlife and Sven Borg from Spacechameleon Adventure Co to trial abseiling and tree climbing. It marks a new era of visitor experiences on and in Parks and Wildlife-managed lands and waters as the viability of adventure activities is explored.

The boardwalk leading visitors to the beginning of the walk was selected as the site for abseiling, guaranteeing safety for the abseilers and ensuring other users of the Tree Top Walk were not impacted. The location of the tree climb was chosen to minimise the environmental footprint of the activity and in response to the outcome of a health check by an arborist. A pulley system was erected alongside an ancient karri tree, which enabled people to 'climb' up as far as they wanted and down at their own speed. The 40m ascent is challenging, but has been mastered by people of all ages – including a five-year-old who made it look effortless. Even 'Spingle' the Tree Top Walk mascot spider has conquered it. The response from those who have completed the climb is that the views were well worth the effort.

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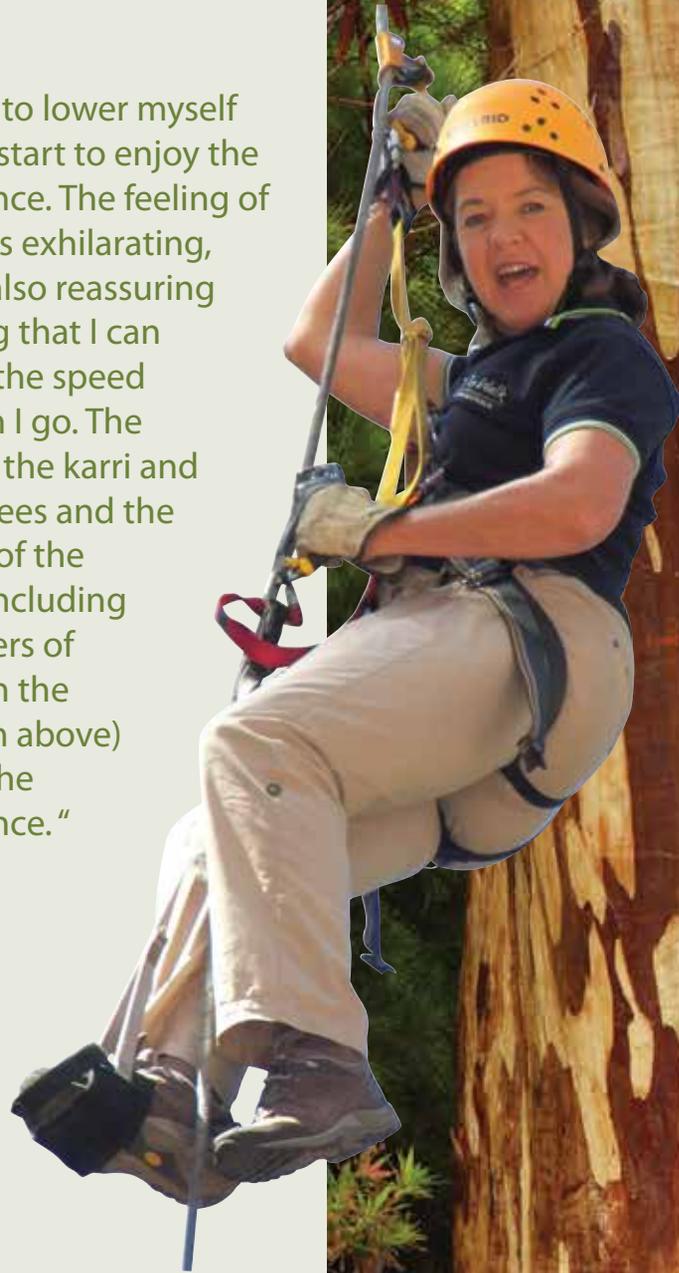


Above Tree Top Walk guide Charmaine Brown enjoying the ride.

Photo – Julie Ross/Parks and Wildlife

Right The magnificent karri trees offer the perfect backdrop for the Tree Top Walk.

Photo – Andrew McInnes





Above Sven Borg from Spacechameleon Adventure Co assists Julie Ross to descend.



Left 'Spingle' the spider expertly navigating the descent to the forest floor.

Photos – Parks and Wildlife

A WILD RIDE

A trial was held in December 2014 and March–April 2015 with resounding success. More than 675 people completed the abseil and 465 climbed up the karri tree, nearly two thirds of participants were children. The success of the trial indicates there is a definite market for experiences that cater to people who are looking for 'soft adventure' and regular visitors to the Tree Top Walk who enjoy an opportunity to do something a 'little different'. An expression of interest will now go out to interested operators to see

what opportunities can be progressed to deliver adventure activities at the Valley of the Giants. It may be ropes courses, tree climbing or climbing walls. Until then Parks and Wildlife will continue fulfilling visitor expectations at the Tree Top Walk. And I wonder what's next in store for this adrenalin junkie.

Julie Ross is the Tree Top Walk business manager. She can be contacted on (08) 9840 8263 or by email (julie.ross@dpaw.wa.gov.au).

Do it yourself

Where is it?: Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk is located in the Walpole-Nornalup National Park, 18km drive from Walpole and 52km from Denmark.

What to do: Bushwalking, birdwatching, nature observation, guided tours, holiday programs and picnicking.

Facilities: Walk trails, Discovery Centre – featuring a great range of visitor information and displays, gift shop, bike racks, toilets, wheelchair and stroller hire, car park.

Natural attractions: Much of the plant life in this forest is unique to the south-west of WA and some have origins that can be traced back 65 million years to the super continent Gondwana when Australia was joined with what are now Africa, India, Antarctica and South America. The magnificent tingle trees that occur here are unique to the area and, together with the karri trees, play host to a raft of birds, mammals, frogs and insects.

Opening times: Daily 9am to 5pm (extended hours 26 December to 26 January 8am to 6pm). Closed Christmas day and during hazardous conditions.

Free guided tours: Plan your trip to include a fabulous guided walk of the Ancient Empire, guided walks are offered daily outside the school holidays. Guided walks are free of charge, but may be subject to weather conditions.

Holiday activity programs: Enrich your experience of the Tree Top Walk by joining in one of the many fun-filled activities held each school holiday period (excluding winter).

For schools: The Tree Top Walk offers an established ecoeducation program designed to engage students in nature while fulfilling outcomes of the curriculum. *Nearer to Nature* programs can be tailored to suit your school group requirements.

Admission fees apply.

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