



A growing number of Parks and Wildlife-managed attractions in the south-west are providing thrills to those with a penchant for heights. Well-known attractions such as the Granite Skywalk, Mount Frankland Wilderness View Lookout and the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk are extremely popular among the many thousands of people who visit them each year. Now, impressive new upgrades at The Gap in Torndirrup National Park are set to provide visitors with yet another spectacular way to experience the area from a totally different perspective. Take a journey to see how these can be experienced in as few as four fun-filled days.

by Steve Crawford



Standing safely on the edge of the enormous rocks at The Gap in Torndirrup National Park, it's impossible not to be awed by the spectacular natural processes that have sculpted this coastline. For millions of years the Southern Ocean has bashed away at the granite and created 'The Gap' and the Natural Bridge, which today attract more than 200,000 visitors each year.

Until now, viewing opportunities were limited and continued weathering made venturing onto The Bridge unsafe. Thanks to \$5.75 million funding through *Royalties for Regions* and Parks and Wildlife's capital works program, a new development is being built in the area.

When complete early next year, the ambitious and impressive new precinct will include new lookout structures for The Gap and Natural Bridge. These will give visitors an amazing view across the Southern Ocean and along the coastline to West Cape Howe while they experience the sensation of being 'suspended' above the ocean as they view the surge of the swells below. For the more faint-hearted there will be plenty of viewing opportunities that are less 'thrilling', but no less spectacular. At the right time of year, this view might include whale spotting.

The two features will be connected by a wheelchair-accessible path which also links to the new car park. Visitors will also be able to take advantage of a new picnic area and a space to gather. These areas will be fitted out with interpretive information to help visitors understand and appreciate the rich and fascinating natural history of

GETTING HIGH IN NATURE

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Opposite page

1 A computer generated visual of the new facilities at The Gap, Torndirrup National Park scheduled to open in February 2016.

Image - Parks and Wildlife

2 The Tree Top Walk, Valley of the Giants Walpole-Nornalup National Park.

Photo - Jiri Lochman

3 The Granite Skywalk at Castle Rock, Porongurup National Park.

Photo - Andrew Hassal

Left The Gap, Torndirrup National Park.

Photo - Damon Annison

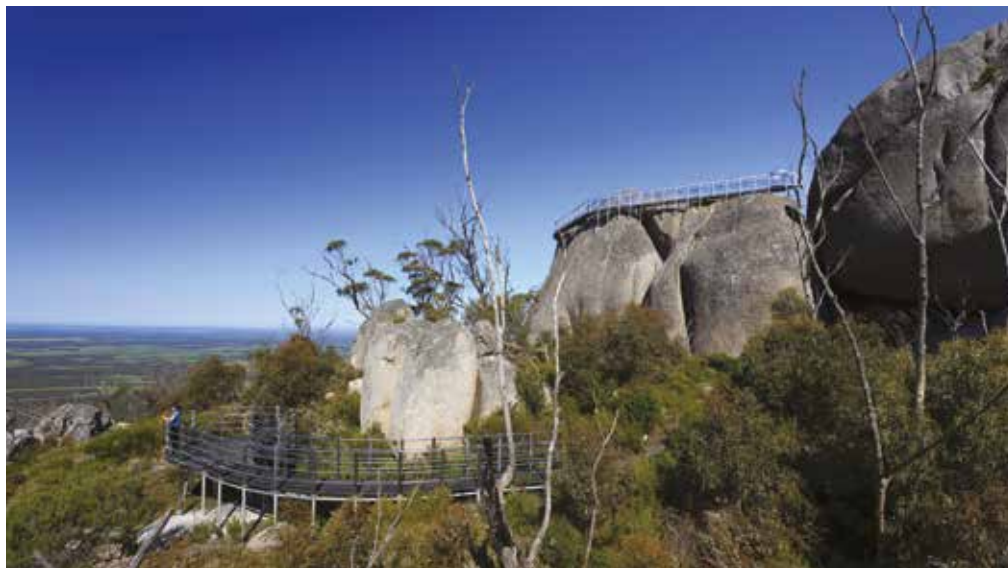


Above A steep climb down at Mount Frankland.
Photo – Peter Nicholas/Parks and Wildlife



Above right Mount Frankland.
Photo – Jiri Lochman

Right The Granite Skywalk, Castle Rock, Porongurup National Park.
Photo – Parks and Wildlife



the area. Visitors are also encouraged to drop into the nearby Discovery Bay to view its historic whaling station, botanic garden and Australian wildlife.

The world-class visitor precinct at Torndirrup National Park is the newest south-west attraction that enables visitors to 'get high on nature'. The Granite Skywalk, Mount Frankland Wilderness View Lookout and the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk provide visitors with a range of different experiences in nature, catering for those with nerves of steel who are seeking an exhilarating endeavour, as well as families looking for a pleasant way to enjoy nature in a different way.

A WALK IN THE SKY

Head north from Torndirrup National Park and you'll find the phenomenal Granite Skywalk at Castle Rock in Porongurup National Park. A two-hour

uphill walk, which challenges even the fittest walkers, leads to the skywalk. Access to the top viewing platform requires visitors to scramble over rocks and climb up a ladder, but the slog is well worth it. This amazing structure provides a panoramic view out to Mt Gardner and Mt Manypeaks and across undulating farmland, while visitors can enjoy the feeling of being perched on the edge of a massive granite outcrop. For those brave enough to look down, the view to the forest floor below through the grid flooring reveals just how high up the structure is.

TREE CLIMB

A visit to the Southern Forests – Walpole Wilderness is a must on any itinerary through the south-west. The area is a vast natural and wild landscape with many visitor attractions to enjoy. Two standouts that offer an opportunity

to get a view with a difference are the Mount Frankland Wilderness View Lookout and the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk.

The Wilderness View Lookout, located on the side of Little Mount Frankland in Mount Frankland National Park, provides breathtaking views across the western side of the Walpole Wilderness with views down to the Frankland River as it makes its way to the coast. Visitors experience a sense of true wilderness in the area, which has little sign of human activity or inhabitation, and have the opportunity to soak up the sights and sounds of the forest. Visitors of all ages and abilities can enjoy this lookout on the universally accessible path. For those with a bit more time and a reasonable level of fitness, a steep one-hour climb to the summit is rewarded with 360-degree views of the area.



1. Warren National Park
2. D'Entrecasteaux National Park
3. Mount Frankland National Park
4. Walpole-Nornalup National Park
5. Walpole and Nornalup Inlets National Park
6. Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk
7. William Bay National Park
8. Torndirrup National Park
9. Porongurup National Park

Plan your trip

Here's a suggested itinerary for a four-day self-drive 'getting high in nature' tour with optional add-ons with local commercial tour operators licensed with Parks and Wildlife for those travellers with more time.

Day one

If you're setting off from Perth, an early-morning start will maximise your trip. An overnight stay at the WA Wilderness Glamping facility in the magnificent Warren National Park means you'll arrive with nothing to do but relax and enjoy your day. Everything will be set up for you, including your own family or couples tent, bedding and cooking facilities.

Options: Join Pemberton Discovery Tours to experience dense forests, water cascades and the massive Yeagerup Dunes or hop aboard a Donnelly River Cruise and experience the magnificent D'Entrecasteaux National Park.

Day two

Use today to visit the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk, and Mount Frankland Wilderness View Lookout and other attractions in the Walpole Wilderness. You'll find a range of accommodation types in and around Walpole or Denmark.

Options: Cruise the waters of the Walpole and Nornalup Inlets with WOW Wilderness Cruises or take a trip with Out of Sight Tours to West Cape Howe National Park.

Day three

Drive towards Albany via William Bay National Park and onto Torndirrup National Park. Visit The Gap and Natural Bridge

and enjoy the new facilities when opened in 2016. Visit the Granite Skywalk in Porongurup National Park in the afternoon and return to Albany for the night or stay locally in Mount Barker or Porongurup.

Option: If time permits take a detour to Discovery Bay (near Torndirrup National Park) and enjoy a helicopter ride to Breaksea Island with Skyhook Helicopters.

Day four

Set off on a leisurely drive back to Perth via Albany Highway.

Option: Stop off in Kojonup and visit The Kodja Place, a fascinating visitor centre that provides insight into country life that will delight and move you.

Stay connected

ParkFinder WA is a great way to plan your trip and stay on route while you're away. It has information about 150 parks and reserves in Western Australia, including photos to inspire your journey and park alerts to keep you up-to-date with the latest park news. Meanwhile, *CampingMate* helps campers plan their next camping trip (see 'In review' on page 15).

These apps can be downloaded for free from the Apple Store and Google Play.

The *ExploreParks WA* website gives you all the information you need to start planning your trip – see parks.dpaw.wa.gov.au.



Tree Top Walk Pass Giveaway

Win a Family Pass (two adults and two children) to the Tree Top Walk by sending an email to touring.wa@dpaw.wa.gov.au with **LANDSCOPE** in the subject line and tell us the four must-see 'getting high in nature' sites.*

*All entrants will automatically receive a copy of Touring Western Australia — a Department of Parks and Wildlife electronic newsletter detailing the latest nature-based tourism news and events for park visitors and tourism businesses.

WIN!



Licensed tour operators

For more information about the licensed commercial tour operators mentioned go to:

WA Wilderness Glamping

www.wawilderness.com.au

Pemberton Discovery Tours

www.pembertondiscoverytours.com.au

Donnelly River Cruises

www.donnelyrivercruises.com.au

WOW Wilderness Eco Cruises

www.wowwilderness.com.au

Out of Sight Tours

www.outofsighttours.com.au

Skyhook Helicopters

www.skyhookhelicopters.com.au

Other visitor attractions mentioned include:

Discovery Bay

www.discoverybay.com.au

The Kodja Place

www.kodjaplace.com.au

Left Tree Top Walk.

Above and far left The new public viewing platforms at The Gap, Torndirrup National Park, scheduled to open in February 2016, will provide access for those with wheelchairs, prams and other walking aids.
Images – Parks and Wildlife

The magnificent and popular Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk has delighted more than three million visitors since it was opened in 1996. The award-winning structure soars gently upwards to a dizzying 40m into the foliage, before descending to the forest floor and the Ancient Empire Walk. Along the walk, visitors journey through the forest, among the gigantic tingle trees, getting a birds' eye view of the forest below.

People of all ages and abilities can enjoy the facility, with full wheelchair and pram accessibility. Those looking to enhance their experience can up the ante, and take part in one of the holiday programs held at certain times of the year. Back on solid ground, visitors can peruse locally sourced crafts and artworks in the shop.

A LONG WEEKENDER

These features can be enjoyed over a four-day trip from Perth and many of them enjoyed by people of varying ages and abilities (see also 'Access for all', *LANDSCOPE*, Spring 2015). They provide an opportunity to experience the south-west from a different perspective and to get

a different view of the plants and animals that occur there. There's nothing like going spot-lighting for brushtail possums in the tingle forest from 40m in the air, viewing the Southern Ocean crashing beneath your feet or having 360-degree views across untouched wilderness to make you feel connected to nature.

Steve Crawford is Parks and Wildlife's visitor communications manager. He can be contacted on (08) 9334 0214 or by email (steve.crawford@dpaw.wa.gov.au).

WA Naturally's The best of the South West is a collection of our favourite stories from around the south-west. It's perfect to take along with you to help guide you around, flick through as you plan your next trip or as a souvenir of your most recent journey. It is available for \$14.95 from WA Naturally Publications by calling (08) 9219 9071, online at shop.dpaw.wa.gov.au or from good book shops and tourist centres.

