





Going off-road

showcasing Western Australia with Google

A partnership between DBCA and Google is showcasing key Western Australian tourist trails and natural attractions to the world like never before.

by Rod Annear



There is no question that the digital revolution has created change in nearly every aspect of our lives. And, while this era of constant connection and access to information can be overwhelming and challenging at times, there's more to the internet than cat videos and narcissistic selfie-takers; it provides an undeniably invaluable resource that can create improvements for almost every industry, including tourism, recreation and land management.

A PICTURE PAINTS A THOUSAND WORDS

Launched in 2007 using the Street View Car, Google Street View – a function of Google maps – is one such example. Google Street View enables people to virtually 'travel' around the world for a detailed street-level perspective. Google Street View provides 360-degree horizontal and 290-degree vertical panoramic views of wherever Google and other contributors have captured images, which is an ever-growing number of streets, tracks and trails around the world, and an increasing number of other significant sites, such as inside buildings and other landmarks as well as at festivals, sporting and other events.

In February 2018, DBCA joined forces with Google to embark on the ambitious task of capturing images of more than 200 trails across WA, covering 3000 kilometres, and taking in some of the State's most stunning and iconic sites, to be made available through Google Street View.

It was recognised that this project presented an opportunity to promote WA's natural attractions and nature-based experiences to a 24-hour global market and share information about the facilities and sites in WA with prospective local, domestic and international travellers. It would also provide a preview of what visitors could expect, including attractions, campgrounds, and road and trail conditions, to help them plan their trip and to aid with navigation once they got there. Recent visitors can also share their experiences, helping to inspire the next generation of

tourists. But it's not just people who are planning to come who would benefit from the project – it also provides an opportunity for members of the community who may never get to actually experience our landscapes, parks and trails, due to disability or other access limitations, with the opportunity to 'virtually visit' WA's stunning and spectacular destinations. And, by building awareness of WA's natural areas, this project promotes environmental values and fosters support for biodiversity conservation across the broader population.

The Google Street View project also provides private businesses that partner with DBCA and rely on attractions and facilities in national parks and other reserves with the option of linking to the images on Google Street View, providing a connection to and more information about the real thing.

The collection of Street View imagery is also collecting data that can be used in other Google products, such as Google Story Spheres, a tool that lets you position audio within 360-degree images to create an interactive experience. Virtual reality (VR) apps also leverage Google Street View to provide users with a more immersive experience.

In addition, having a pictorial record of WA's natural assets also provides information about the condition, access, infrastructure and maintenance needs across the DBCA-managed estate, which can be used for auditing and works planning.

I'VE BEEN EVERYWHERE, MAN

So, in 2018, more than 15 DBCA staff and volunteers embarked on this epic project. They were trained in how to use the Google Street View Trekker – a wearable backpack with a camera system on top, which weighs about 18 kilograms and has been loaned to the State Government by Google. By wearing the backpack, 'trekkers' are able to capture images of areas the normal Street View Car cannot access, manoeuvre through tight narrow spaces and visit locations only accessible by foot or bike. This approach of capturing images for Google Street



Previous page
Main Hakea Trail, Fitzgerald National Park.
Photo – Mark Pybus

Above Cathedral Gorge, Purnululu National Park.
Photo – DBCA

- Opposite page*
- 1) DBCA marine vessels were used to collect Google Street View images.
Photo – DBCA
 - 2) Mt Bruce, Karijini National Park
Photo – Mark Pybus
 - 3) Nature's window, Kalbarri National Park.
 - 4) Yanchep National Park.
 - 5) Rottneest Island.
Photos – DBCA

View was first used in the rough, rocky terrain of Arizona's Grand Canyon in 2013. Google has also expanded its camera fleet to include Street View Trollies, Street View Snow Mobiles and even Street View Trikes. Google is now working with partners to collect underwater Street View imagery.

The first pair of WA trekkers started their journey at Cape Peron in Rockingham Lakes Regional Park on 23 February 2018 (see also 'Parks for people: Rockingham Lakes Regional Park' on page 8). For the next three months, the team of trekkers travelled around Perth and through the south-west, capturing images of iconic sites such as Bluff Knoll in Stirling Range National Park, the Granite Skywalk at Porongurup National Park and The Gap and Natural Bridge at Torndirrup National Park. They also journeyed through many regional and national parks. In June, they



followed the sun and ventured north to places like Purnululu, Windjana Gorge, Geikie Gorge, Karijini and Kalbarri national parks, as well as Yawuru country in Broome. In spring and early summer, they embarked on capturing the long trails in the State's South West and Midwest regions.

While there is some irony, perhaps, in being able to 'virtually visit' some of the world's most remote destinations, which people travel to with the intention of 'unplugging' from technology, these applications present a raft of new opportunities to market WA to the world, showcase our spectacular natural landscapes to foster support for their protection and conservation, and share them with users who may otherwise be unable to visit.

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Google Street View can be accessed at www.google.com/maps



Legend

- Sites available on Google Street View
- Major road
- River

