

## Karara Rangeland Park

*Located nearly 430 kilometres north-east of Perth – in the heart of the Murchison – Karara Rangeland Park protects a rugged, yet varied and beautiful landscape, which is steeped in Aboriginal and European history and plays host to visitors looking for an authentic outback experience.*

**T**he ancient and fascinating landscape of the 560,672-hectare Karara Rangeland Park is believed to have formed 2.5 to 3.8 billion years ago. At this time, basalt hills were created, which have since been sculpted by weathering, geological processes and other factors to produce a landscape rich in iron oxide locked away in banded iron formations. Many remaining granite outcrops are now dotted throughout the landscape and support a range of unique plant and animal species, while others have been eroded away to isolated hills and ridges known as breakaways.

### ANCIENT CONNECTION

The land known today as Karara Rangeland Park has long been important to several Aboriginal groups. Sites and items of cultural significance have been identified, including ancient artwork, rock holes, quartz and other ochre quarries, artefact scatters, rock shelters, lizard traps, stone arrangements and grinding bases.

The extensive Mongers Lake Waterway, which stretches 200 kilometres around the park, is an area of particular significance, and stories and songs have been passed down from generation to generation about how the area was created by the Bimurra creator being.

### MODERN RELICS

The area was first occupied by European settlers when sandalwood cutters began harvesting in the central region of what is now the park in about 1845. In the 1860s pastoral leases were granted, and prospectors arrived in the area after gold was found in the region in 1892.

The area is rich in mineral resources and evidence of historic mining activities can be seen within the park at Rothsay Mine, Warriedar battery and townsite, Rothchild and Fields Find. The area known as Koolanooka Hills Mine became the first source of iron ore to be exported from Western Australia. Iron ore and gold mining continues in the area, and visitors should

stay clear of mining activities and disused mineshafts and pits as they're moving around the park.

Between 1929 and 1939, the then Department of Agriculture carried out wheat cropping trials at Damperwah State Farm, located in the centre of the park, to determine the best wheat varieties and cropping methods for the region. Extensive sheep farming in the area also contributed to WA's prospering sheep industry for many years. The oldest known building in the Murchison is a shearing shed at Thundelarra that can still be visited today.

A number of other sites in the park, including the relics of three buildings that were built in the 1920s as part of

**Above left** Ruins at Damperwah State Farm provide a glimpse into the area's European history.

*Photo – Marie Lochman*

**Above** Red kangaroos occur in the park.

*Photo – Sallyanne Cousans*



### Journey to Karara Rangeland Park

Scan this QR code or visit Parks and Wildlife Service's 'LANDSCOPE' playlist on YouTube.



Left *Rhodanthe chlorocephala* subsp. *splendida* carpets the landscape.

Photo – Marie Lochman

Above Gould's monitor (*Varanus gouldii*).

Photo – Paul Robb/DBCA

## “Most of Karara Rangeland Park lies within the Southwest Australia International Biodiversity Hotspot ...”

Damperwah State Farm, preserve the rich European history of the area and offer visitors a glimpse of yesteryear.

The John Forrest Lookout in Damperwah Hills marks where John Forrest established a survey point during his 1897 expedition to the area. It provides stunning 360-degree views across the park and is the ideal vantage point to view the ancient banded iron formations. Forrest named Damperwah Hills in 1869, while searching for Ludwig Leichhardt's lost exploration party. Leichhardt was a German explorer who disappeared with his entire party while travelling from Queensland to WA in 1848. Their disappearance remains a mystery to this day.

Located just south-west of these sites, a waterhole in a granite outcrop, which became known as Camel Soak, was an important water source for camels and workers engaged in building the Rabbit-Proof Fence and is still used by visitors and wildlife today. The Rabbit-Proof Fence was constructed in the early 1900s in an attempt to prevent the east-west spread of rabbits. It was made up of three parts – the first divided WA in two as it extended 1834 kilometres north-south between Eighty Mile Beach in the Pilbara and Jerdacuttup on the south coast. The 1165-kilometre-long 'Number 2' fence was constructed

because rabbits were west of the first fence by the time it was completed. Sections of this fence can be seen in Karara Rangeland Park as it stretches from Bremer Bay to meet the first fence west of Wiluna. The third fence reached from Kalbarri to Yalgoo.

Another relic of the past – an old homestead – can be found in Warriedar in the park's east, and gravesites can be seen at Rothsay and Fields Find cemeteries. Those with a four-wheel-drive vehicle can follow old station tracks that have been used to establish 4WD trails through the western part that link former windmills and trap yards.

Unfortunately, building relics aren't the only legacy of European settlers – their arrival also heralded the influx of introduced animals and plants, including some that have significantly altered the landscape.

In 1995, work began to reverse the impact of these species and secure pockets of land throughout the region for conservation under the Gascoyne-Murchison Strategy. Between 1995 and 2007, the State and Federal governments purchased six former pastoral leases. These former sheep stations, together with several small timber reserves, have become the Karara Rangeland Park and now protect many precious ecosystems that are not

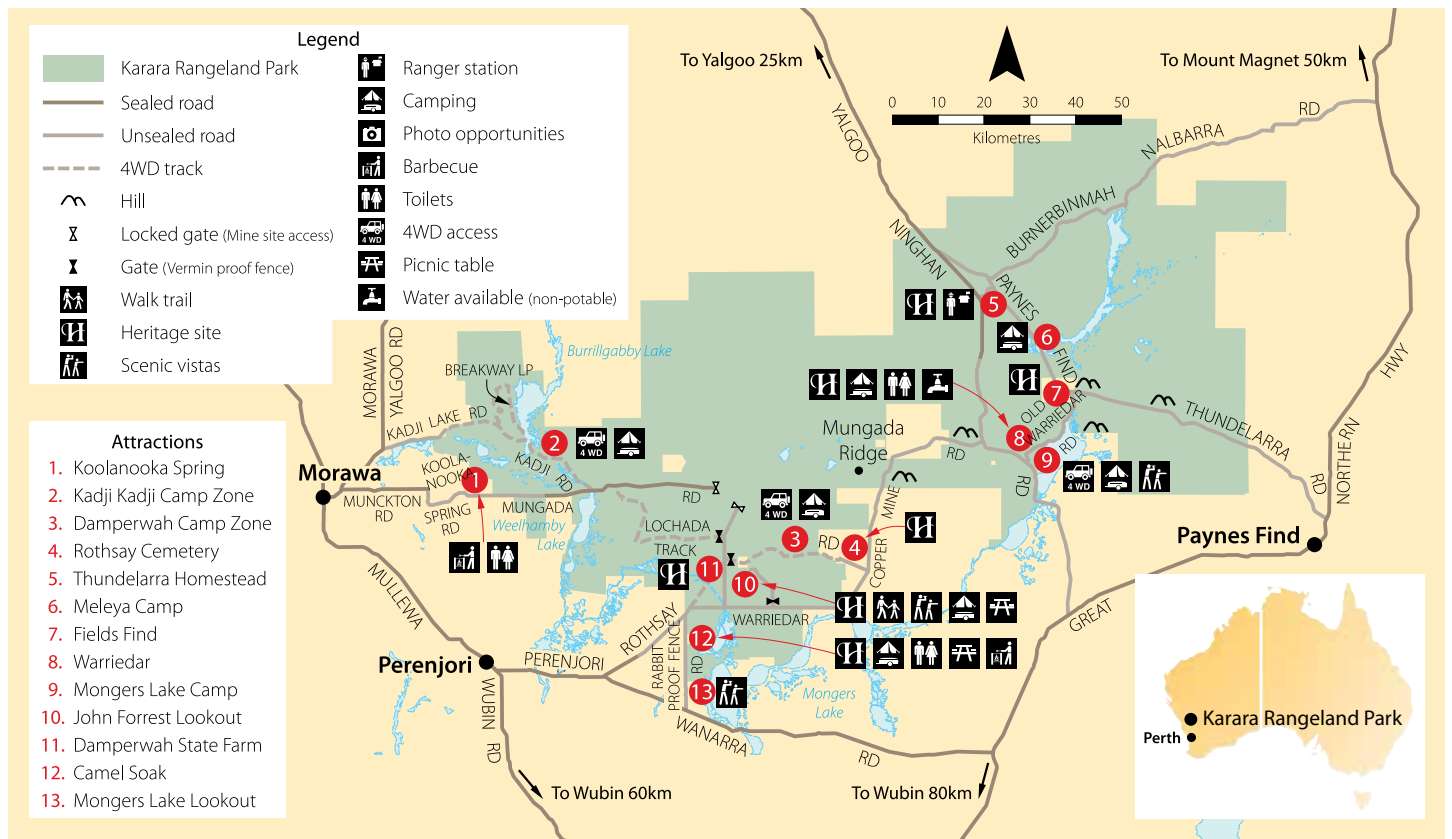
otherwise represented in the conservation estate. As ex-pastoral stations, these areas bear the scars of grazing by sheep and goats over many decades and the resulting introduced weeds persist. But, despite the challenges of managing such a vast area, DBCA has worked hard to destock the area, and ongoing management, particularly of feral goats, will help the landscape to recover.

### NATURAL VALUES

Most of Karara Rangeland Park lies within the Southwest Australia International Biodiversity Hotspot and encompasses a variety of distinct landscapes, species and habitats. Eight-hundred and eighty-three plant species have been identified in the park, which is renowned for its spectacular annual wildflower display between July and September. One species that is particularly important to the area is *Acacia tetragonophylla*, which is known as 'Kurara' by the local Aboriginal people. This plant was a valuable resource; its abundant seeds were eaten raw when young or dried and crushed for flour. Bardi grubs were often found among the roots of the bush.

The area is home to a diversity of bird species, including red-tailed black and Major Mitchell's cockatoos, malleefowl, spiny-cheeked honeyeaters and chestnut-rumped thornbills. After significant rainfall, numerous bird species flock to the normally dry Thundelarra Lignum Swamp,

# Parks for people Karara Rangeland Park



which spans 13,500 hectares and is listed as a Wetland of National Importance due to its significance for waterbirds during wet events. The freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*), one of Australia's rarest waterbirds, is known to breed there.

The park is one of few locations where the natural ranges of WA's three main kangaroo species – Euros (*Macropus robustus*), western grey (*Macropus fuliginosus*) and red kangaroos (*Macropus rufus*) – overlap. All three are common

throughout the park. Nineteen mammals have been recorded in the park, however many have become locally extinct due to the impacts of feral cats and foxes and grazing of vegetation by goats and sheep. The removal of goats and sheep across will enable the native vegetation to recover and, combined with further land management and feral animal control, will encourage native species to return in the future.

## COME AND SEE FOR YOURSELF

Visitors travel to Karara Rangeland Park for an 'authentic' outback experience. Self-sufficient visitors can set up their tent or swag at bush camping areas throughout the park and drift off to sleep with millions of stars blanketing them from the night sky. Caravans and camper trailers are welcome as well as groups of up to 20 in the old Shearers' Quarters at Thundelarra. Camping is also available at the adjacent Shire-run Camel Soak Campground and accommodation is available in nearby towns and station stays. But even if you come for a day-trip, there's always plenty to explore in this stunning landscape.

**Below left** Red-tailed black cockatoos are one bird species that frequents the park. Photo – Sallyanne Cousans

## Do it yourself

**Where is it?** 80 kilometres south-east of Mullewa and 60 kilometres north-west of Wubin.

**Access:** Via Morawa, Perenjori, Yalgoo or the Great Northern Highway. Roads within the park are mostly unsealed and vary in condition so drive to the conditions. Some roads are 4WD only.

**Total area:** 560,672 hectares

**What to do:** Camping, sightseeing, four-wheel driving, birdwatching.

**Facilities:** Basic or no facilities are provided for camping. Group accommodation at the Thundelarra Shearers' Quarters is available by prior arrangement only.

Camping fees apply. Visit [parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park-stay](http://parks.dbca.wa.gov.au/park-stay) for more information.

**Nearest DBCA office:** 201 Foreshore Drive, Geraldton WA 6530. Phone: (08) 9964 0901

