

# ROCKING THE PATTERNS

## KARIJINI NATIONAL PARK

The cool, smooth rocks of Weano Gorge provide refuge from the searing heat of Karijini National Park. Liz Grant dives into the pools among the ancient rock formations and explores the sanctuary of the gorge's hidden caverns.

**photos and text by Liz Grant**

I have a thing about patterns. And rocks. The former are mesmerising, the latter, powerfully grounding and when in huge formations, awe-inspiring. This is what drew me to Karijini National Park. Patterns and rocks. Patterns of rock.

I am in sensory heaven—except for the persistent flies and the relentless baking daytime heat (it is late October and the tail-end of the best season for exploring Karijini). The rocks I love so much here—with their mouth-wateringly attractive banding reminding me of the layers of Viennetta ice-cream cake—are iron rich. Karijini is amid the banded iron formation of the Hamersley Range.

To me, the rocks are noticeably heavier than those I encounter in and around Perth and seem to be especially hot. I speculate it is the iron in the rocks that make them so very effective in taking up the heat and releasing it long into the

night. This makes the shade and chilly water in the gorges especially appealing. The river-gouged gorges are deep and, in many places, sheer-sided, which creates a wonderfully cool refuge.

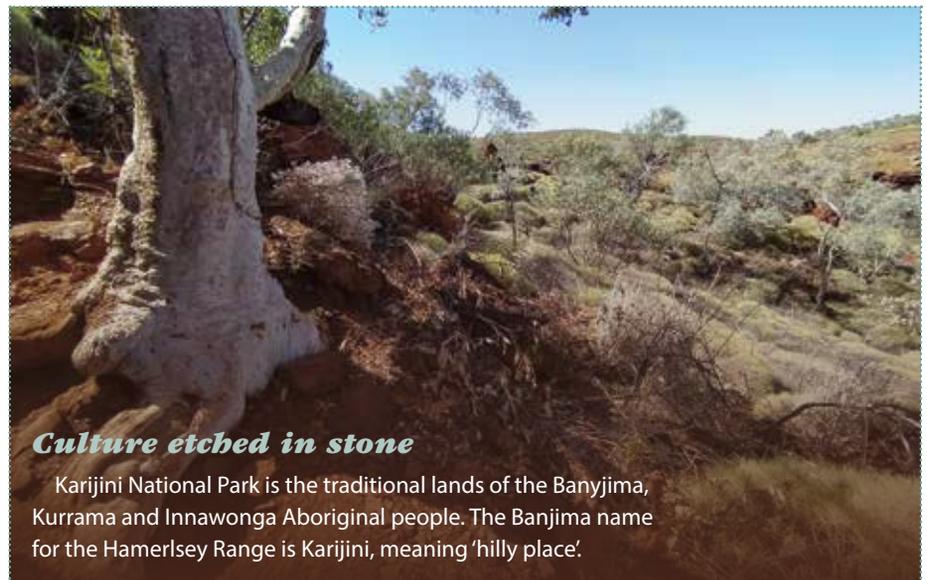
Respite from the baking heat that dulls my senses gives me a chance to not just look, but to really see. After looking up at the immense cliff-face in Weano Gorge with its rock-on-rock layers sandwiched together by geological processes, and sometimes smooshed in folds and angles when the rock buckled under the pressure of horizontal compression, I notice the texture of rock down here, under my feet and hands. Worn smooth by millions of tons of water loaded with tumbling rock debris over eons, the satin surfaces I can reach are as polished as my ex-neighbour's kitchen floor (it was impressive).

Karijini has deep significance for its traditional owners and I can sense its importance. The rock passages leading to Handrail Pool heighten all my senses, especially balance. It is slippery underfoot and it's a novel experience to be so acutely aware of every step, feeling the contact between my trusty reef shoes and the unreliable rock surface, feeling for grip. Striding the pavements of Perth is no training for this. Whoever came up with the phrase 'walk in the park' wasn't talking about Karijini!

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**Main** A tapestry of time etched in rock—Hancock Gorge on the way to Kermit's Pool.

**Inset** The narrow passage in Weano Gorge opens to a roofless cavern cradling Handrail Pool.

**Below** Knox Gorge sentinel—a snappy gum (*Eucalyptus leucophloia*) grips the rocky red earth with gnarled and knobbly roots.



### *Culture etched in stone*

Karijini National Park is the traditional lands of the Banyjima, Kurrama and Innawonga Aboriginal people. The Banyjima name for the Hamersley Range is Karijini, meaning 'hilly place'.

## Do it yourself

**Where is it?** Karijini National Park is located approximately 1400 kilometres north of Perth and around 80 kilometres by road north-east of Tom Price.

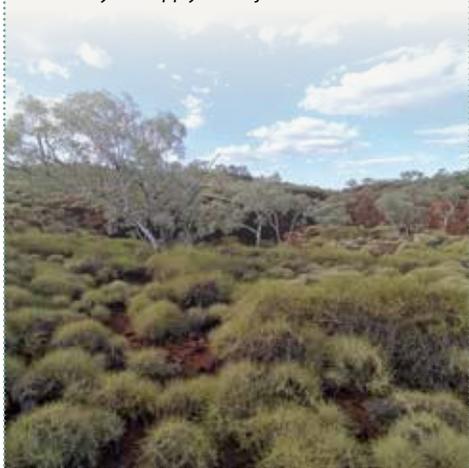
**Planning your trip:** Warning! Flash floods can occur. Your safety is our concern, but your responsibility. Check travel conditions with Parks and Wildlife Service on (08) 9182 2000 or the Shire of Ashburton on (08) 9188 4444.

**Visitor safety:** Karijini National Park offers a variety of hiking trails classified according to Australian standards. Please select to suit your level of ability.

- Do not enter the gorges if there is significant rain in the area. If you are already in the gorges, leave promptly.
- Be prepared. Wear sturdy hiking shoes to get in and out of the gorges. Before hiking through water, change your shoes to those that can grip slippery wet rocks.
- Take enough water to stay hydrated while you are hiking, a minimum of 4 litres per person. There is no drinking water in the park.
- Keep your gear on your back and keep your hands free to help you balance.
- Stay on established trails and stand well back from cliff edges.
- Take care in the gorges. Rocks are smooth and slippery, particularly when wet.
- Walk with a companion. Do not enter these gorges two hours before sunset. You **cannot** follow these trails in the dark.
- Water in the gorges can be very cold, especially between April and September, and hypothermia can occur. During this time, the middle of the day is the best time to hike.
- Do not dive or jump into water.
- Do not take glass or alcohol into the gorges.

**Protecting the park:** To protect the park, drive, hike and camp only on designated roads, tracks and camping areas.

*Park entry fees apply in Karijini National Park*



## REVERENT ROCK

In this narrow chasm in the earth there is a church-like hush. Well, until we start chatting and laughing, then sound echoes and rebounds off the walls and two people sound like a group of six or more. The water is chilly and each time we step or plunge into it we can't help but gasp and giggle.

We smile at strangers doing the same, partners in crime almost. This place

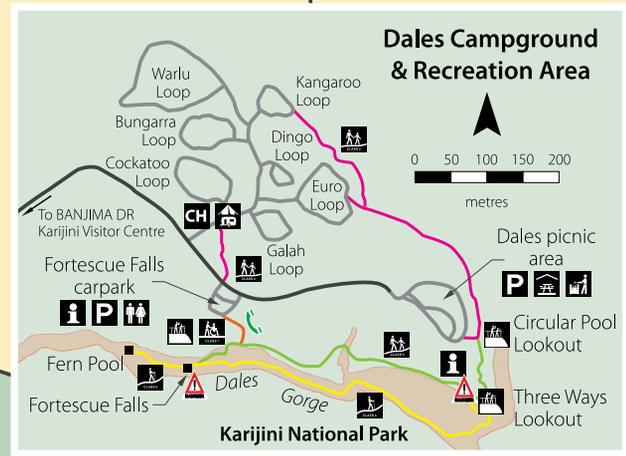
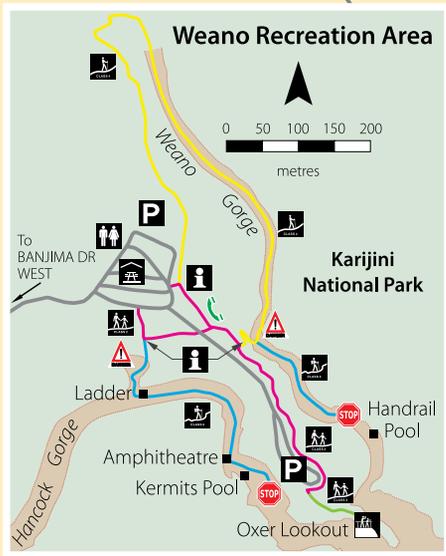
deserves reverence and our noise is just that, noise. But it falls away quickly and the aura of the place is undiminished. Not surprising really, these rocks have been around for some 2000 millions years and have been carved into the landform we now love to look at. Human existence is a mere ant in the path of the giant bulldozer that is geological time.

The immensity of this record of history visible in the slices of exposed rock face is mind-boggling. These gorges are like a vast library of books, so many that no one person could ever hope to read them all. Yet the library is a place of promise and full of hope. That's how I feel here, I can't read all the stories told by these layers of colour, whorls of texture. The patterns fascinate me, the beauty of them and the knowing there is much more to the story. As the

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**Top** Rockface reflections in Handrail Pool.

**Above** Rock sandwich with a swirl at Fortescue Falls, Dales Gorge.

**Left** Clumps of spiky spinifex carpet the landscape along the rim of Joffre Gorge.



**Legend**

**Walk trail classifications**

- Class 1 (Orange line)
- Class 2 (Pink line)
- Class 3 (Green line)
- Class 4 (Yellow line)
- Class 5 (Blue line)

**Other symbols:**

- Ranger's office
- Scenic lookout
- Information
- Toilets
- Parking
- Sheltered picnic table
- Gas barbecue
- Camping
- Campground hosts (seasonal)

**Safety information**

- Emergency radio
- Change in trail classification. Make sure you meet criteria.
- Do not proceed penalties apply. For enquires contact park staff.



**Left** Like craters on the moon, these pockmarks catch the eye on the Dales Gorge Trail.

**Below** Polished to a shine by floods of water. Kermits Pool, Hancock Gorge.

rocks weather, the pattern emerges and reveals the truth of the rock's composition. My fingers trace the bands, feeling for the story I can't translate but I can appreciate at a sensory level.

### QUIET CAVERN

The narrow rock passage leading to Handrail Pool is dim but there is a sliver of bright light beaming through the tall gap ahead. The breeze feels cooler, smells wetter. But as I reach the narrow opening I get only a glimpse of the pool because the smooth rock floor drops away and I have to grasp the rail with both hands to inch my way around and down.

Safely seated I can explore the cavern with my eyes. It feels like a womb, the rock-enclosed pool is protected on all

sides, open only to the sky above, which is reflected in the surface of the pool. As is the rock face that rises high above us. Reflected light ripples across the cliff face as swimmers create gentle wave patterns on the water surface. The magic of light, rock reflecting on water and water reflecting on rock. Karijini is full of magic. The call of birds just before dawn and the creaky sound of crested pigeons' wings as they fly overhead. The glint of spiders' eyes in torch light at night. Water cascading down Fortescue Falls polishing the rock and creating a microclimate for ferns and other damp-loving plants. The gnarled roots of snappy gums digging in and clinging to the slopes above the gorges. The stiff white shafts of spinifex that somehow manage to look soft.

I'm in sensory heaven. Except for the flies, and the mind-numbing heat.



**Liz Grant** is an education communications officer with DBCA's Public Information and Corporate Affairs branch. She can be contacted at [liz.grant@dbca.wa.gov.au](mailto:liz.grant@dbca.wa.gov.au) or 9725 4300.

**Editor's note** As this article was going to print, an incident occurred at Handrail Pool that sadly resulted in the loss of a life. The LANDSCOPE team sends our condolences to the family and urges everyone visiting Karijini National Park to take the utmost caution, especially around the narrow passages within Weano Gorge that can be slippery underfoot.