

A large, ancient tree trunk with deeply textured, furrowed bark dominates the left side of the frame. The forest floor is covered in dry leaves and green undergrowth. In the background, a person wearing a helmet and a light-colored long-sleeved shirt is riding a bicycle on a dirt path. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day, with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Gateway

TO AN ANCIENT WORLD

Dwarfed by the towering tingle and karri trees, visitors to the Walpole Wilderness can't help but feel the undeniable magic of the place. While the famous Tree Top Walk and Ancient Empire have been drawing people to the area for decades, a new mountain biking and walking trail network will soon lure adventurers to experience the majesty of the ancient forest from a whole new perspective.

by Lauren Cabrera and Bron Anderson





The karri and tingle forests of the Walpole Wilderness have an ancient, mystical feel. Towering above the lush, green undergrowth, karri trees dominate the sky but it's often the gnarled old red tingles (*Eucalyptus jacksonii*) that catch the attention of passers-by.

The trees are the stars of the Giants Trails, with the new mountain biking and walking trails leading visitors deep into the forest and up close to some of these giant natural wonders.

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The Giants Trails are suitable for all skill levels.

Top Cyclists can design their own adventure on the trails.

Photos – Nic Quinn/Ride On

Above Ruby bonnet (*Cruentomyces viscidocruenta*) and other fungi can be seen in the wetter months.

Above right Holly flame pea (*Chorizema ilicifolium*) put on a colourful display.

Photos – Bron Anderson/DBCA

Above far right Walking amongst the giant trees.

Photo – Nic Quinn/Ride On

This new trail network will offer a mountain biking experience different from anywhere else in the State, weaving amongst the famous forest. Between 40 and 65 kilometres of single-track riding trails are expected to be ready by early 2025. As well as mountain bike trails, there are several dual use trails designed for riders and walkers and a dedicated walk trail through the heart of the tingle forest.

The trails are designed in such a way that there are endless possibilities for riding and walking loops. Visitors can create their own adventure based on their experience, time frame and interests whether it be a short stroll through the tingle forest or setting out for the day on cross country mountain bike trails, riding through the Walpole Wilderness.

CONSIDERATE COLLABORATION

The local community are used to the sights of mountain bikers as the 1000-kilometre Munda Bididi Trail runs through Walpole. A section of the popular mountain bike trail was realigned by WA trail builders Magic Dirt Trailworx to accommodate the new trail network, which provided an opportunity for learning about how to navigate the forest and how

best to ensure the giant trees were not harmed.

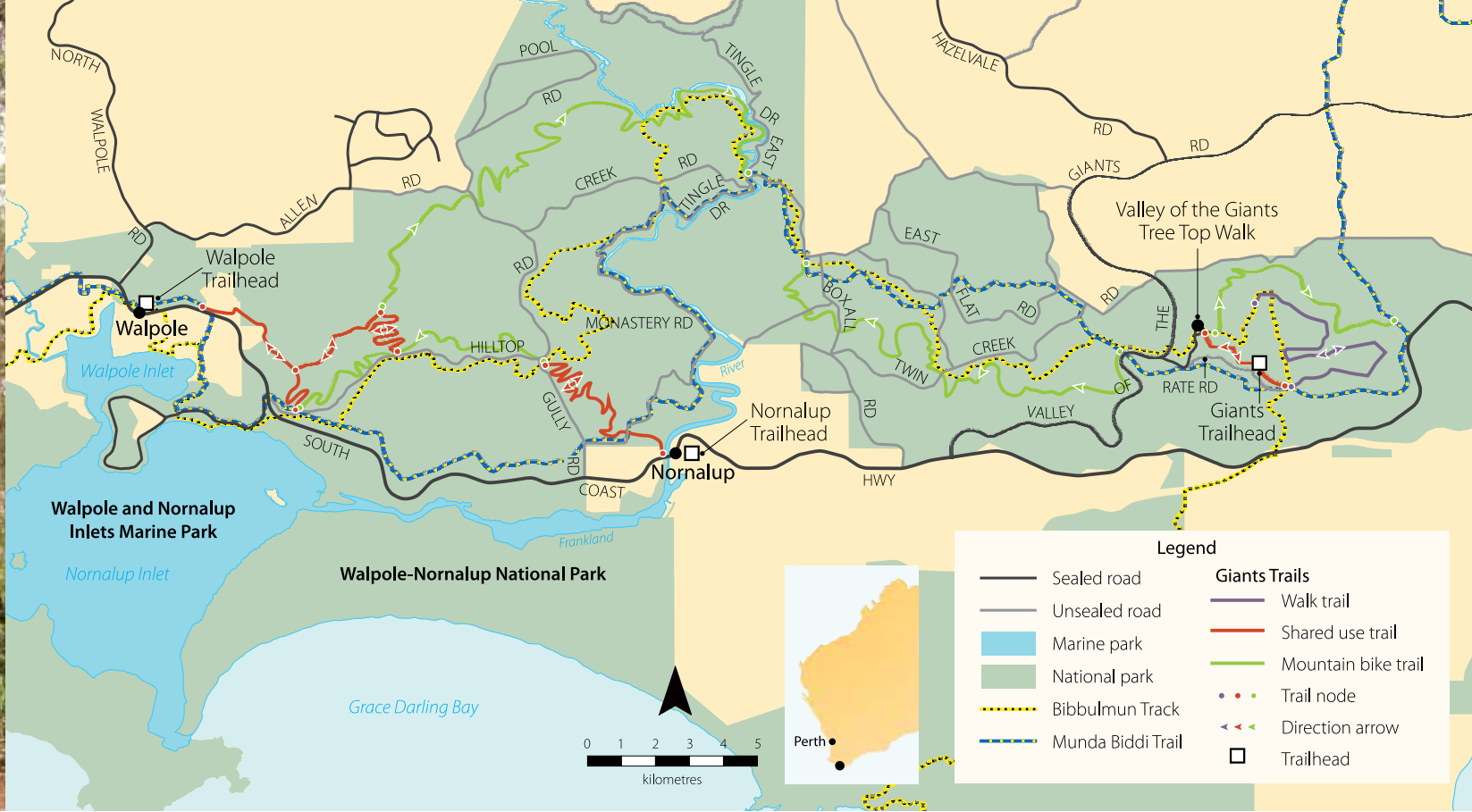
Common Ground Trails are also engaged in the design and build of the network around the rare trees, taking into account the fragility of the area. The tingle trees present a unique challenge for the trail builders as they have a broad base and a shallow root system that spreads wide.

As a result, building methods have been adjusted to protect the trees and care taken to avoid and protect the fragile root system. In such a high rainfall area, drainage is also an important consideration in the design of the trails. As a result, the trails are more leisurely 'green trails' that strike a balance between keeping a reasonable distance from the trees and being close enough to experience them.

BIODIVERSITY ABOUNDS

The Walpole Wilderness is renowned for its biodiversity and the Giants Trails take you through the best of it. Tall karri and tingle forests and whispery sheoak groves give way to open jarrah woodland, stands of kingia's and granite outcrops.

A myriad of beautiful and bizarre fungi can be found during the wetter months of the year and spring brings a blaze of



“The trees are the stars of the Giants Trails, with the new mountain biking and walking trails leading visitors deep into the forest and up close to some of these giant natural wonders.”

Right Marvelling at the size of the ‘Pleated Lady’ tree.

Photo – Nic Quinn/Ride On

wildflowers to the forest. Holly flame pea (*Chorizema ilicifolium*), tree hovea (*Hovea elliptica*) and karri dampiera (*Dampiera hederacea*) put on a colourful display.

Growing only in this high rainfall corner of south-west WA, red tingle trees (*Eucalyptus jacksonii*) have a shallow root system that spreads as they age, causing them to buttress. These buttresses can be over 20 metres in circumference and are often hollowed out by a combination of insect and fungal attack, and then fire.





“It’s a really iconic landscape along the Frankland River,” David Wilcox from Common Ground Trails said. “You’re talking about some of the biggest trees in the world—the tingle trees only grow here and are absolutely towering—right next to these beautiful waterfalls.

“It’s quite an incised landscape, so it’s about 200-plus-metres of vertical, most of it this big deep cut, exposed granite outcrops through the valley. It’s just an idyllic place for mountain biking.”

RIDE AMONGST THE GIANTS

Riders will want to take their time on the trails as every corner opens up a new vista such as the view of the Southern Ocean at Hilltop Lookout, or curves alongside another gnarled old tingle tree through deep river valleys.

Several of the trails give riders and walkers the opportunity to get up close and personal with the trees and bikes can be ridden through the middle of one tree, on a platform specially designed to protect its fragile roots.

A standout trail is one that takes riders deep into the valley of Kwakoorillup Beela (Frankland River).

“It’s not going to be your gravity enduro, jumpy kind of trails for the 18–30 [year old] crowd,” Rod Annear, Assistant Director of Parks and Visitor Services said. “It’s more of the mass market leisure riders that want to get out and go for longer rides. And the gravel scene as well, you’ll be able to ride your gravel bike on all of these trails.”

While the giant trees are a defining feature of this new project near the Valley of the Giants, there is no shortage of awe-inspiring moments for people of all abilities and expectations.

“When I had the Indigenous group come through with me after we built the first trail, they were just so stoked going, ‘We need this in here. People need to be able to see this forest. We need these

trails, so people can come through and actually see it,” John Dingey from Magic Dirt Trailworx.

With trailheads in Walpole, Nornalup and near the Valley of the Giants Tree Top Walk (see ‘Walking with the giants’, *LANDSCOPE*, Autumn 2017), the Giants Trails will be easily accessible from the South Coast Highway once completed in early 2025.

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Above left The ‘Ride Through Tree’ is an iconic experience on the trails.

Above The trails offer more leisurely riding adventures, suitable for all abilities.

Below A contemplation spot in the forest.
Photos – Nic Quinn/Ride On



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