

protected



Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

reinstating true national parks

barron falls - a national park before its time
currawinya national park
walking mossman gorge
greater bilby
the national park experience

Issue 4 August-September 2015



Welcome to the August/September edition of **Protected**

Michelle Prior, NPAQ President

The park featured in this edition is Currawinya National Park. In June, I had the pleasure of attending the Currawinya Muster with the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS). My fellow travellers included a range of senior and very experienced staff, which created a rich environment for discovery.

The trip involved a visit to Currawinya National Park and the Bilby Fence, then tagging onto the tail end of the Boorara Muster – where several rangers had come from far and wide to undertake the assessment and planning of the three properties that form the newly declared extension of Currawinya NP. This extension will make Currawinya one of the largest national parks in Queensland.

What stood out most, was the challenge of converting valuable conservation land from former grazing properties into a national park, particularly when accompanied by a myriad of derelict buildings and infrastructure; the very real possibility that the \$5.3 million allocated for the first five years would be eaten away in the early stages of planning and managing the dereliction of the property; the issues that local areas face in losing valuable rates and community in isolated and remote areas; the issues of feral species and the problems in managing them; and the sheer magnitude of the properties and the challenges of managing them as national park.

The trip renewed my appreciation of our national parks and the people that manage them.

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------|----|
| Welcome to Protected | 2 |
| Reinstating true national parks | 3 |
| Barron Falls | 6 |
| Currawinya National Park | 8 |
| Mossman Gorge walks | 10 |
| Greater Bilby | 12 |
| The National Park Experience | 13 |
| What's On | 14 |
| Letter to the Editor | 15 |

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Images

Cover and page 2 strip - River Red gums, Paroo River, Currawinya NP (Paul Donatiu).



REINSTATING TRUE NATIONAL PARKS

Don Marshall
NPAQ Member

Peter Stanton (*Protected* April-May 2015) eloquently wrote of *...some of Queensland's grandest scenery ... the upper reaches of four of the largest perennial streams ... highest mountains ... and vast beautiful landscapes with inspiring beauty.*

NPAQ's 85th birthday reminded us of the ideals sought by founders Romeo Lahey, Arthur Groom and others with wide community support in 1930. They saw a national park as a personally attractive treasure, a relatively large area of outstandingly beautiful landscape worthy of keeping for its nature, for recreation, and for desirable uses such as maintaining physical, mental and spiritual health. Romeo's particular dream was for a high quality graded walking track system for Lamington National Park that provided easy access to its natural wonders for people of all ages.



A youthful Romeo Lahey with boots and billy about 1910 in what became Lamington National Park (Oxley Library).

The remarkably valuable 'invention' of a national park in the United States in the mid-19th century was driven in part because of a sense of cultural inadequacy compared with Europe's historic memorials. Large natural

'cathedrals' like Yellowstone, Yosemite and Grand Canyon became special grand landscapes that still stand in the American psyche (Sydney Morning Herald Traveller, 25-26 April 2015). Only subsequently were they found to have important biological values.

In Queensland, as in other States, the human psyche was to keep some natural bush where for almost a century all suitable land had been allocated to grazing, agriculture, mining, forests, roads, railways and townships. Lamington, Springbrook, the Bunyas, Eungella and even Carnarvon National Parks were seen as most desirable destinations for ordinary people, particularly for walking among wondrous trees and plants, seeing even rare species and creatures, and enjoying views from close-up to the horizon. Bush camping and boiling the billy over an open fire were enjoyable events. The Government responded in part by building a network of walking tracks with fireplaces in Southeast Queensland so people could reach some almost inaccessible, but very scenic places like Purlingbrook and Coomera Falls. Camping, tramping and campfires were common uses.

This approach was continued by governments and the community into the 1950s and 1960s, particularly as the population and visitor numbers grew and more vehicles could reach distant places, even for a weekend's camping and walking. In the early 1970s, there was growing concern for maintaining 'biological diversity'. In the absence of a

broad range of land classifications and management responsibility, the rationale for national parks shifted from the scenic to the scientific. 'Biodiversity' became the prime criteria for park selection and acquisition.

Over time, we as individuals, members of urban, regional and rural communities, organisations, commercial operators, and voters of governments with many departments have come to accept that 'national park' is synonymous with nature conservation. This is not so. While parks may be a cornerstone, they should not be considered as the be-all and end-all of what today is but a part of the vast concept we know as 'the environment'.

This situation has come about for many reasons. NPAQ members and others sought more national parks and expansion of the existing park estate. Educators convinced students that nature could be preserved best in national parks. Students chose tertiary science courses like botany, zoology and biology and demand grew for professional ecology positions. Green politics emerged as lobby groups sought to stop expansion of grazing and agriculture. No longer were politicians persuaded that there was a need to protect more relatively large areas merely for their stunningly beautiful appearance, people's outdoor pastimes and good health. Scientists and researchers sought to sway the argument by invoking 'biodiversity'. New satellite colour imagery and ground-truthing of newly designated



'biogeographic regions' helped support estimates of threatened plant and animal species. The community embraced this approach, as did park managers and rangers.

Politicians responded by combining 70 years of national park management under forestry departments with wildlife expertise under primary industries departments in the National Parks and Wildlife Act 1975. More national parks were declared and some existing ones enlarged. NPAQ was delighted. However, over time, more and more national parks were effectively 'locked up'. Their management became easier by limiting visitor numbers, requiring permits, or simply banning uncontrolled activities. Little attempt was made to address people's wishes to use a park and to consider separating conflicting interests. The original national park concept was largely buried in the nature conservation avalanche, such as the Nature Conservation Act 1992. Over several decades, increasing the extent and percentage area of Queensland for nature conservation through national parks became the goal. This strategy continues.

The result is that Queensland, the world's sixth largest sub-national entity (population >4,580,700) has 301 named national parks. These range from 1.416ha (Sarabah) to 1,012,000ha (Munga-Thirri). Thirty-six exceed 30,000ha. Another 39 cover 10,000ha to 29,999ha. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service is required to manage 12,339,275ha,

the largest area in the state with a single owner.

Some are relatively pristine and spectacular. Many have histories of grazing, agriculture, timber extraction, bee-keeping and mining. Some have been seismic tested, drilled for oil, water, coal and minerals, and fossicked. Some are highly significant for recreation and tourism. Others exist primarily to protect and maintain certain species. Others are historic ruins. Most have been subject to flooding, fires, drought and storms, feral animals and weeds. So there are many values, many variables, many uses, and many management responses.

Australia has more than 700 national parks with definitions varying state by state. New South Wales has 203. After 140 years, the United States including Alaska has 59 national parks; the USA Parks Service has managed to handle intense pressures by people and uses based on decades of research and practice. After 101 years, Switzerland is considering a second national park surrounded by 13 villages.

Do we really have 301 national parks covering 8,746,006ha representing the quintessential natural Queensland, the core of our beautiful places?

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) seeks to influence the actions of governments, business and other stakeholders by providing information and advice, and through lobbying and partnerships. Its World Commission on Protected Areas

(WCPA) has developed a system that classifies reserves according to their management objectives. Its categories are the global standard for defining and recording protected areas. Increasingly, these categories are being incorporated into government legislation. World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve declarations for securing the world's most important natural areas are actions that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation can take.

Currently 'national park' is IUCN category II of effectively seven, detailed at www.iucn.org. This reserve is described as a large, natural or near natural area set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provides a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities.

This very broad portrayal is qualified by a primary objective of protecting natural biodiversity with its underlying ecological structure, supporting environmental processes, and promoting education and recreation. Six supporting objectives address managing the natural state, maintaining populations of native species, contributing to conserving wide-ranging species, managing visitor use, considering indigenous people's needs, and contributing to local economics through tourism.



Category II also states that a national park's distinguishing features will typically conserve a large and functioning 'ecosystem', possibly complemented by sympathetic management in surrounding areas. A national park's key roles in the overall landscape/seascape are also addressed, and how it differs from the other six categories. There may be three pages of words, but authorities and managers still have a wide scope to determine and act, even considering related issues of the concept of 'naturalness', the challenges of commercialisation, and the impact of settled populations.

Where are we heading? Queensland today has an unequalled opportunity to clarify the roles of all areas currently called national park, but that have different management and conservation objectives as reflected in the IUCN classifications.

Consider the following process:

- A. Review and classify existing national parks in the context of the IUCN categories — a challenging but essential task.
- B. Establish a legislative framework for classifications.
- C. Allocate existing reserves to their respective categories.
- D. Ensure park management plans identify the category for each plan area and set appropriate specific quantifiable management objectives.

Terms other than national park could embrace wildlife/flora/fauna nature reserves and refuges, scientific reserves, wilderness areas, scenic areas, heritage areas, State parks, marine parks, forest parks, forest recovery, conservation, environmental or regional parks, natural monuments, indigenous joint management areas, special management, co-ordinated conservation areas, trusteeships, classes, estate, land for wildlife, and any combination of these. Areas or parts judged inappropriate protected areas could be revoked and declared other managed tenures.

The outcome would be an IUCN-based system of protected areas. Perhaps 10 or 12 true national parks in the original sense could emerge for all of Queensland. These could be managed accordingly with sufficient funding for staffing, facilities for various groups of users, returns of revenue raised, and of course for their nature conservation values. These would be recognised as world class, deservedly seen and enjoyed by multiple generations. Complementary protected areas could be managed with clear intents, with more or fewer people, with uses appropriate to the category, and with full regard to modelling for climate change. These would include limiting some uses to buffer zones around national parks, as well as manipulation of habitats to help preserve rare and threatened species.

The key purpose would be to restore the meaning of national park in the

community mind, with consequent respect for its specific purposes in designated areas. Nature conservation would continue in the sense of a broad concept applying everywhere.

Reinstatement now or in the near future might seem to be an impossible goal for politicians and people fearful of change, much less to the national park sacred cow. However, to thinking members of NPAQ, pledged to promoting the preservation, expansion, appropriate management and presentation of national parks in Queensland, the action outlined is logical and would produce a satisfying and lasting legacy.

Images

Pg3 - Pool in Mossman Gorge (Paul Donatiu).

Pg4-5 banner - Looking out from Freds Gorge, Minerva Hills National Park (Paul Donatiu).

Below - Keen climbers in the Glass House Mountains in the 1930s (NPAQ Archive).



BARRON FALLS

A National Park before its time

Peter Ogilvie, NPAQ Councillor

The State Forests and National Parks Act of 1906 came into force on 1 January 1907. It was the very first piece of legislation, certainly in Australia but possibly the world, to provide a framework for declaring national parks across a whole legal jurisdiction, namely Queensland. Earlier parks in other Australian State jurisdictions – for example, Royal in NSW, Tower Hill in Victoria, and Belair in South Australia – were set aside as discreet entities under either their own special statute (e.g. Tower Hill National Park Act 1892) or as a reserve under the relevant Land Act (as was the case for Royal NP). The same was true of the early national parks in the USA (Yellowstone) and Canada (Banff). They were not part of a broader legislative scheme.

The Queensland legislation was unique in Australia and, subject to contrary evidence, a first for the world. The first national park declared under its provisions has, for more than a century, been lauded and celebrated as the first in Queensland. That was Witches Falls National Park, a small area of 324 acres (131 hectares) on the side of Tamborine Mountain which was proclaimed on 26 March 1908. It is now part of Tamborine National Park.

But was it really the first national park in Queensland?

If so, it took Queensland quite a while, almost 30 years, to follow the NSW lead – Royal National Park was declared in 1879. South Australia, Victoria and Western

Australia had taken action in the 1890s with the declaration of Belair, Tower Hill and Greenmount (John Forrest) National Parks.

While documenting the history of national parks in Queensland for the centenary of Witches Falls in 2008, a most unexpected national park came to light. It had been declared in precisely the same manner as Royal, using the provisions of the Land Act which provided a capacity to declare reserves and give them a name and a purpose. The Government Gazette of 22 September 1900 recorded that a Reserve for National Park had been proclaimed under The Land Act, 1897 on 19 September 1900 over an area of about 7,500 acres (3035 hectares). It was given the name Barron Falls National Park.



The park owed its existence to the newly constructed railway from Cairns to Kuranda. It is worth contemplating the importance of railways in promoting the existence of national parks in many parts of the world in the late 1800s and early 1900s when trains were the main form of public transport. Yellowstone (USA), Banff and Jasper (Canada), Royal (NSW),

Belair (South Australia) and John Forrest (Western Australia) all had railway access and support for their existence. Witches Falls didn't fit the pattern, but the newly unearthed Barron Falls National Park definitely did.

The line from Cairns to Kuranda was opened in 1891. The journey terminated in full view of Barron Falls which, at that time, was a spectacular and unconstrained waterfall. The Railway Department initially sought to have a significant area of land adjacent to the falls declared a reserve for railway purposes. That request for a railway reserve was rejected in a letter to the Commissioner for Railways, stating that the Minister for Public Lands "does not see the necessity for the large reserve for railway purposes, in the locality referred to, nor does he consider it expedient to grant same". A strip of land one chain (20 metres) wide on either side of the line was considered sufficient.



Available records suggest, but don't confirm, that the call for national park status was put forward by the Railway Department's district engineer



in Cairns. The Land Commissioner for Cairns, Mr T. White, supported the idea, referring it to the Under Secretary for Public Lands on 7 April 1900 with the following endorsement: "With reference to the suggestion by the Railway Department that a large area in the neighbourhood of the Barron Falls should be reserved for a National Park, I beg to state that I consider the suggestion to be a very good one, and recommend that it be adopted".

For some unstated reason, the proposal needed the imprimatur of a higher authority than the Minister for Public Lands. On 8 May 1900, it was referred to the Chief Secretary's Department with a request that it be laid before the Premier, Robert Philp. He approved it on 11 May 1900, thereby clearing the way for the 19 September 1900 Proclamation by the Governor, Baron Lamington, and the subsequent gazette notice that about 7,500 acres had been temporarily reserved as a Reserve for National Park, Barron Falls. And thus the very first national park in Queensland saw the light of day.

When The State Forests and National Parks Act of 1906 came into force, it was reasonable to expect that Barron Falls National Park would be given permanent reservation status under that legislation. It didn't happen, but not through lack of trying. In February 1914, the Land Commissioner wrote to the Under Secretary for Lands in Brisbane pointing out that the Barron

Falls area had become a popular tourist destination, and recommending that "to protect the beautiful native fauna, the whole of the reserve, inclusive of unalienated surveyed land, be permanently reserved under The State Forests and National Parks Act of 1906". This was not agreed to, and five years later (June 1919) the Government Gazette announced that the area of the park had been reduced to 6,700 acres and was now designated as "Reserve for Park, Barron Falls". Thereby, the first national park disappeared as enigmatically as it had appeared nineteen years earlier.

It is a safe assumption that the reason for not giving the area the stronger protection provided by the new legislation was that a hydroelectric power station was being considered, and the government wished to maintain the flexibility of a reserve that could be easily revoked or amended. Under the new legislation, that sort of action would have required a separate act of parliament.

The power station did eventuate. It was opened by the Governor, Sir Leslie Wilson, in November 1935. That effectively removed any impediment to giving the reserve full national park status. The Barron Falls Reserve for Park (R 167) was cancelled and, on 1 February 1940, Barron Gorge National Park of 7,000 acres (2,833 hectares) was proclaimed under the provisions of The State Forests and National Parks

Act of 1906.

Barron Falls Reserve for National Park has a unique place in the history of national parks in Queensland. It can lay claim to being the first national park in the State. But it was not the first of many, as no other Land Act reserve for national park, before or since, has come to light. That status still resides with Witches Falls National Park which was the first in a dynasty which the Barron Falls reserve joined in 1940.

Images from left - Barron Falls (circa 1900) showing the area's close relationship with the railway, Barron Falls (1933) with the railway in the foreground, Barron Falls today. All images courtesy of the Queensland Government.



PARK IN FOCUS

Currawinya National Park

Denis McMullen, NPAO Member

You'd be forgiven for thinking that the drive southwest of Charleville holds little for national park enthusiasts, but nothing could be further from the truth. There are many gems along the way, but the ultimate prize is Currawinya National Park, sitting on and to the north of the Queensland-New South Wales border, some 1,000 km west of Brisbane.

Whilst being important for the conservation of a range of Australian species, Currawinya is a Ramsar declared site and fulfils all six of the nomination criteria. In particular, the Currawinya Lakes form part of an inland route for migratory shorebirds and is listed under a number of international agreements including the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species.

One of the centre pieces of this national park is its two lakes. Separated by only a few kilometres of sand dunes, Lake Numalla to the east holds freshwater, while the slightly larger Lake Wyara's water is saline. Both fill locally, though Lake Numalla is often flushed by floodwaters overflowing from the Paroo River to the south. Both are listed in the Directory of Important Wetlands in Australia. The strategic purchase and gazettal of three properties to the north (Boorara 115,000 ha, Werewilka 53,000 ha

and Oolamon 21,000 ha) protect the headwaters of these lakes and bring the total area of the Park to 344,000 hectares, making it one of Queensland's largest national parks.

Currawinya's lakes and wetlands are critical breeding and refuge sites for many bird species including egrets, herons, cormorants, ibis, plovers, brolgas, sandpipers, godwits, snipes, rails, dotterels, stilts, red-necked avocets, silver gulls and Caspian terns. When conditions are right, thousands of black swans, pelicans, coots, ducks (including the rare freckled duck) and grebes crowd the surface of these places. Dawn and dusk are the best times to visit and observe birds. In all, Currawinya provides habitat to over 200 species of birds including dryland species such as Major Mitchell's cockatoo, chestnut-crowned babbler, orange chat, mulga parrot, white-fronted honeyeater and the splendid fairy-wren.

Apart from birds, at least 24 mammal species, 14 frogs, 51 reptiles and more than 430 species of plants have been recorded from Currawinya National Park. Prominent animals include the Western grey kangaroo (near the northern limit of its distribution), Red kangaroos, Eastern grey kangaroos, Wallaroos, Koalas, Brush-tailed possums, several species of bats including the rare Little pied bat, Water-rats, Fat-tailed dunnarts and Narrow-nosed planigales. About 50% of the

Park is made up of Mulga (*Acacia aneura*) and Poplar box (*Eucalyptus populnea*) low open woodland on sandplains. Shrub-covered dune fields intersect with numerous small claypans and salt pans. In the north and west, tablelands, ranges, low hills and undulating plains support Mulga, Bastard mulga (*Acacia stowardii*) and Turpentine mulga (*Acacia brachystachya*) communities, while the channels and flood plains of the Paroo River mark the southeast boundary of the park, and support Yapunyah (*Eucalyptus ochrophloia*) and alluvial Gidgee (*Acacia cambagei*) communities. There are many plants found in Currawinya at the southern or western limits of their range. Of note are populations of Black bluebush (*Maireana pyramidata*)





and Inland belah (*Casuarina cristata* subsp. *pauper*), thought to be relic communities or rare occurrences in Queensland of habitats suitable for these plants (Currawinya National Park Management Plan 2001).

Topographically, the Park protects parts of the Martha and Hoods Ranges, with an unusual outcrop called The Granites, a major feature north of Ten Mile Bore on the Boorara Road. Currawinya also contains active and remnant mound springs, especially on the western side of the Hoods Range. The latter are often just dry, circular depressions with a raised lip, while active springs appear as small green oases and can support highly endemic plants, fish and insect species. These springs provide an important water source for plants and animals in a

semi-arid region. It is thought that active springs within this component of the Great Artesian Basin now only discharge about a third of their early 20th century output due to water extraction; the springs are also threatened by grazing from feral animals and physical disturbance.

For sheer isolation and a chance to experience the immeasurably vastness of outback Queensland, you can't beat Currawinya. In a good season after sufficient rain, wildflowers abound, especially wattles, cassias and plants in the Asteraceae family, which includes many daisies. At night, there is no better place than around your campfire sharing stories of Park adventures under clear skies awash with stars.

What to do:

The Park, and sites within the Park, are really only accessible by 4WD.

1. Lake Numalla and Lake Wyara - a 85km round trip from the QPWS Office with some interesting stops along the way including the Kaponyee Lakes. Note that the condition of the Lakes can vary greatly from year to year.
2. The Granites - a 20km round trip from the QPWS Office. It's an easy walk to The Granites with great 360 degree views of the national park from the top. Along the way you'll pass

some fascinating plants including Beefwood (*Grevillea striata*) and Desert bloodwood (*Corymbia terminalis*). The latter can produce masses of creamy-white flowers attracting numerous birds and insects.

3. Old Caiwarro homestead - a 75km round trip from the QPWS Office, but also a good first stop in the Park from Eulo (70 km to the north, and the closest township to the Park with the exception of Hungerford on the Qld-NSW border). From these ruins, you can easily access Corni Paroo waterhole, the Red River gum-lined banks of the Paroo River, and several sheltered campsites.
4. Historic Currawinya woolshed - just to the south of the QPWS Office, this beautiful timber structure show just how large sheep holdings were in the region. Drive on to Ourimperee waterhole.

The rest of the Park is very remote and walkers need to be fully self sufficient, experienced and very well equipped to attempt to explore these areas.

For more information, go to:

http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/currawinya/about.html#things_to_do

Images clockwise from top left - Corni Paroo Waterhole and River red gums, Lake Wyara pelicans, QPWS and NPAQ staff inspecting animal tracks at The Granites (Paul Donatiu).



FEATURED WALK

Mossman Gorge

Denis McMullen, NPAQ Member

The Daintree Rainforest, a 120,000 hectare precious relic of the once vast Rainforests that covered so much of the super-continent Gondwana, presents its attractions and its challenges to modern Australia and to a vast number of tourists from across the world.

It throws out its challenge to those who would seek to investigate its awe and beauty as well as to those hardy souls who want to test their courage, skills and expensively equipped 4WD experience on its tortuous, rutted tracks, unpredictable river crossings, cloudy mountains and sweeping rains of one of the wettest climates in Australia. It is one of the oldest continuously existing rainforests in the world, at around 135 million years and, as a result, has high complexity: just one hectare can contain over 30,000 species of plants and animals.

In geological terms, the area goes back 400 million years when the ocean covered the present Qld North Coast and the coastline was around 100kms west from its present position. The rivers coursing down from mountains delivered sediment into the ocean which formed into Granite and sedimentary rock which continued to rise under pressure to form the existing mountains.

The history of terrestrial plant forms on Earth goes back 500 million years, and ferns and clubmosses such

as those found in Daintree reached their greatest diversity 435 million years ago. The most primitive plants found within the Daintree Rainforest include *Huperzia* (Tassel ferns – formerly *Lycopodium*), *Selaginella*, *Lycopodiella*, *Psilotum* (Ribbon ferns), *Marattia* and *Angiopteris* (King fern).

The climate of tropical North Queensland, dominated by the interplay of the monsoonal rain of the Summer, locally referred to as the 'Wet', and the stable and warm 'Dry' winter, has created sanctuaries in the deep, moist valleys where many species, driven to extinction elsewhere during the drier, inhospitable ice ages, were able to shelter and from whence they regenerated to emerge and fill the wet forest when the ages rolled and the climate turned. The Daintree Rainforest was World Heritage listed on 9th December 1988. It was assessed as meeting all four of the criteria for listing:

1. Outstanding examples representing the major stages of the earth's evolutionary history.
2. Outstanding examples representing significant ongoing geological processes, biological evolution and man's interaction with the natural environment.
3. Superlative natural phenomena, formations or features or areas of exceptional natural beauty.
4. The most important and

significant natural habitats where threatened species of plants and animals of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science and conservation still survive.

The Daintree is amazing in that it provides a wide range of environments and soil types which support plants and animals found nowhere else. It's rainforests are like a vast interconnected puzzle, a vast holding of ecological secrets that we may never fully unearth.





The traditional custodians, the Kuku Yalanji people, moved along an intricate web of paths through the forest, collecting the seasonal produce and hunting the animals of the forest. But even the most lavishly equipped and intrepid 4WD driver can do little more than follow the tracks, by ferry across the Daintree River, and along the coast on the well-worn 30 km Bloomfield Track to Cape Tribulation and beyond. The National Park follows the line of the mountains and is difficult to access. It rears above the forest and includes peaks such as Black Mountain (1337 metres). For most visitors, it's a matter of catching what glimpses and impressions one can get.

The area most easily accessed, and which gives some hints to the glory of the Daintree for most visitors, is Mossman Gorge (gazetted as a National Park in 1967). Access to the Gorge can be via the Mossman Gorge Centre, an indigenous ecotourism project with a café and restaurant, providing training for local people in tourism and hospitality. It also offers an Art Gallery featuring work by local people, in paintings, pottery, photography and gifts. Vehicles can be left in the extensive hard-surface parking area and visitors can take the shuttle bus.

The Gorge is located at the southern end of the Daintree Rainforest, 5.2 kms north of Mossman, itself some 80 kms north of Cairns along the Captain Cook Highway. It is visited

by thousands each year and includes a Rainforest Circuit with a raised walk leading to a suspension bridge over Rex Creek, which joins the Mossman River, a cascade running over rocks and forming deep pools, which invites swimming on warm days, though there are warning signs that strong flows can be very dangerous, particularly in the Wet.

Beyond the suspension bridge, the well-laid out 2.7 km **Rainforest Circuit** winds through rainforest that has been sung and embellished by generations of stories. A focal point for these tales is Mount Demi, which for vast uncountable generations has been Manjal Dimbi, the towering mountain which overlooks the site, and has protected the Kuku Yalanji from the menace of the evil spirit Kubirr. Wurrumbu al Dimbi refers to how the protective ancestor spirit Wurrumba is constantly present as the "mountain holding back".

Other short walks include **Baral Marrjanga** (270m, easy) - a stroll through rainforest from the car park to a lookout with views of the Mossman River and ranges beyond (suitable for wheelchairs, strollers and the vision-impaired), the **Lower river track** (300m, moderate to easy) - follows the Mossman River to several small lookouts, and the **Rex Creek suspension bridge** (460m, moderate to easy) - follow Baral Marrjanga to the lookout, then take the sign-posted track to the left.

The best way to experience Mossman Gorge and gain some insight into its significance is the Ngadiku Dreamtime Walks, conducted by the local Indigenous people. Ngadiku (Nar-di-gul) means stories and legends from a long time ago in the local Kuku Yalanji language. The walks take visitors on a journey along private, gentle tracks, visiting special places and culturally significant sites, past traditional bark shelters and over meandering cool rainforest. There is a traditional 'smoking' ceremony that cleanses and wards off bad spirits. Your experienced interpretive Indigenous guide will demonstrate traditional plant use, making bush soaps, ochre painting, identify bush foods, and provide an enchanting narrative of the rainforest and their special relationship with this unique tropical environment. At the end of the tour enjoy traditional bush tea and damper.

All images taken on the Rainforest Circuit (Paul Donatui). For more information go to: <http://www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/daintree-mossman-gorge/>



WILDLIFE FEATURE

Greater Bilby

Michelle Shaul, Contributor

Macrotis lagotis, also known as the Greater Bilby, Bilby and Rabbit-eared Bandicoot, is the only surviving species of its genus and the only surviving member of the sub-family Thylacomyinae. Its close relative *Macrotis leucura*, the Lesser Bilby, is believed to be extinct. The Greater Bilby is listed as Vulnerable by the IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature), Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia, as Endangered in Queensland and as Extinct in New South Wales. The total population of this species is estimated at 400-600 individuals, but numbers are believed to be declining.

The Bilby's namesakes are its large, long ears (*macrotis* means big eared in Greek), which are covered in the same soft blue-grey fur that covers its back, slender limbs and long pointed snout. It has a black tail with a white tip and white-cream fur on its stomach. Its forelimbs have three clawed and two unclawed toes that it uses to build networks of spiral-shaped burrows, which can be up to three meters long and two meters deep. At this depth, the burrow maintains a moderate temperature of around 23 degrees Celsius, providing comfortable shelter from extreme desert temperatures.

Bilbies can have up to a dozen different burrows for sleeping and escaping predators. Given the size of these burrows, Bilbies will often repair existing ones instead of laboriously building one from scratch; some Bilby burrows are thought to date back hundreds of

years. Given the necessity of these burrows, Bilbies favour areas with light to medium soils where burrowing is easier, such as sand dunes. They are omnivorous and feed on plants as well as insects.

While it once roamed over 70% of Australia, the Greater Bilby is now reduced predominately to the desert areas of the northern states. Its current range is an area <20% of what it was prior to European settlement. Although a number of factors have contributed to its decline, fox and cat predation are significant. Bilby populations also abruptly halt where pastoral land begins, and are reduced in areas where rabbits flourish, suggesting that competition and grazing activity make land hostile for the Bilby. Altered fire regimes also affect the food sources that the Bilbies rely on.

The Bilby was thought to be extinct in Queensland until the 1960s when a small, outlying population was discovered in the state's southwest between Boulia and Birdsville. Astrebla Downs National Park now manages the State's most important wild population of the Greater Bilby. A population of Bilbies had also been re-introduced at Currawinya National Park, but was recently lost when its enclosure was breached by feral cats. The recent expansion of Currawinya through the gazettal of three adjoining blocks, acquired by the previous government, adds new hope that Bilbies will again be reintroduced. The Bilby highlights one of the principal roles that national parks play - the conservation of threatened species - and how difficult on-ground this can be.

Images courtesy of the Queensland Government.



THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

why national parks should be valued, told through the lens of personal experience in national parks

Tanya Pritchard

The moment I roll up to a National Park I can feel my mind expand and my worries diminish. I breathe the fresh air and drink the water from the creek. I listen to the songs of the bush and at once feel more connected with myself and to the world around me. And I feel re-energised in my efforts to get engaged in protecting the lifeblood of our nation, our national parks, our natural places.

All the best and most vivid moments of my life are from being in the bush. My first experience wandering through the bush was as a young girl growing up in Mt Isa. Regular forays to the Gregory River and Lawn Hill Gorge saw me floating along pristine waterways on my lilo, zooming through the rapids and exploring red desert pathways. In these arid landscapes with their watery oasis's I can feel the ancient history floating around me. My father flew light aircraft which meant I was lucky enough to spend many a holiday visiting remote areas in Queensland including Sweers Island in the Gulf and many cattle stations around the northwest.

These outback experiences as a child led to a life-long desire to experience remote natural places. I have been lucky to have undertaken long hikes in many spectacular National Parks in Tasmania, southeast Queensland, the Larapinta trail in the MacDonnell Ranges, the Pyrenees and Scotland, to name but a few. One of the most amazing places I have been was Plitvice Lakes National Park in Croatia with sixteen spectacular limestone

lakes, inter-connected by a series of waterfalls, and set in deep woodland populated by deer, bears, wolves, boars and rare bird species.

Currently, as a busy working mum of two young daughters my National Park adventures are squeezed in between watching soccer games, domestic chores and birthday parties. Whenever there is a quiet moment I dream of my next adventure. I am trying my hardest to instil my passion for our natural heritage into my two daughters. My eldest daughter was nine months old when I carried her on the Fraser Island Great Walk for five days. This walk is etched in my memory as one of the most special times in my life.

We have visited many National Parks together and share the joy and wonder of seeing native wildlife in their natural environment. Lady Musgrave Island is one of our favourites where the mutton birds stumble into your tent and you step off the shore into the magical wonderland of oceanic wildlife. With just a snorkel and mask we have swum with gigantic sea turtles, manta rays, reef sharks and endless species of fish, starfish, shells and the miracle of seahares, found at low tide along the reef flat. And as the sun goes down a glass of bubbly as we watch the sharks swim in with the tide. All the effort of lugging the camping equipment and two weeks supply of food and water across the island has been forgotten.

I believe that the majority of Queenslanders want a healthy

environment for future generations to enjoy. We need to continue to secure climate refugia, threatened species habitat and build wildlife corridors.

It's my biggest wish that my children's children will be able to enjoy the National Park experiences that I have had. To this end I shall continue my efforts with passion to ensure we reach that 17% of protected areas in Queensland by 2020!

Tanya Pritchard is a Conservation Scientist with the Queensland Trust for Nature. QT4N recently hosted the inaugural private land conservation conference.



Images
Banner strip - part of Tasmania's South Coast Track (Paul Donatiu).
Above - cascades in the Hartz Mountains (Paul Donatiu).

NPAQ Activities

Daves Creek Wildflower Walk at Lamington National Park

Sunday 6 September

Location: Lamington National Park

Grading: Easy

Leader: Dave Jones (3343 2447)

Fee: \$3 (members) \$10 (non-members)

A shortish 12km walk from Binna Burra timed to coincide with the peak of the wildflower season!

Walkers will leave Binna Burra and climb to 1,100m through a variety of vegetation communities including sub-tropical and temperate rainforest, and box forest, before emerging onto montane heathland and a profusion of native wildflowers (including the Blossom orchids below - Paul Donatiu).

Morning tea at the Molongolee Cave or nearby lookout before lunching on Surprise Rock with magnificent views towards the Gold Coast and Mts Hobwee and Merino.

Note that the date for this activity is no longer what was advertised in the June-July edition of Protected magazine (Sunday 30 August).



Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 19 September

Location: Brisbane area

Leaders: Angus McElnea, Russell Gardner (0429 854 446)

It's spring - a great time to get your hands dirty in our wonderful restoration project at Boombana and Jollys Lookout, D'Aguilar National Park!

Birding at Oxley Creek Common

Sunday 20 September

Location: Oxley Common off Sherwood Road, Sherwood.

Grading: Easy flat walk

Leader: Ian Peacock

Fee: \$3 (members) \$10 (non-members)

This well maintained level park is situated between the suburb of Sherwood and the Rocklea Markets; the entrance is well signposted from Sherwood Road.

The area has the mangrove lined Oxley Creek, woodlands, open grass paddocks and two lagoons with substantial waterbird populations. In all, a very popular birdwatching location!



Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 24 October

Location: Brisbane area

Leaders: Angus McElnea, Russell Gardner (0429 854 446)

If you couldn't make it last month, this is another great opportunity to get involved with our great little restoration project at Boombana and Jollys Lookout, D'Aguilar National Park! Local Grey gums in the photograph above (Paul Donatiu).

Social Walk to White Rock

Wednesday 23 September

Location: White Rock Spring Mountain Conservation Estate, School Road, Redbank Plains

Grading: Easy

Leaders: Len & Laurelle Lowry (0428 335 572)

Fee: \$3 (members) \$10 (non-members)

White Rock is a prominent sandstone feature in open forest in the Redbank Plains area. It is a significant area for aboriginal people, has served as a training ground for our military forces and now is a popular recreational area. There are views to the city and at this time of the year the spring flowers will be out.

Prior to commencing the walk we will have morning tea and take lunch to have at White Rock. The walk is on a wide level gravel track with only a slight climb to the sandstone escarpment.

This 6km walk can be achieved with average fitness and it's school holidays, so bring along your children or grand-children.

Note that the Long Weekend Camp at Goomburra, Main Range National Park, originally planned for 3-5 October, is no longer going ahead.

For more information, or to register for an activity, please go to the website - www.npaq.org.au/events



Upcoming Activities

Birding at Brisbane Botanic Gardens, Mt Coot-tha

Sunday 25 October

Clif Bell Memorial Picnic

Sunday 1 November

Vegetation Management Group

Saturday 21 November

Birding at Nudgee Beach, waterholes and bushland

Sunday 22 November (see image below left of mangroves at Nudgee Beach - Paul Donatui)

Social Walk along the Brisbane River

Wednesday 25 November

Calendar Dates

National Biodiversity Month

September

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/biodiversity-month>

World Shorebirds Day

6th September

<https://worldshorebirdsday.wordpress.com/>

National Threatened Species Day

7 September

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/threatened>

National Bilby Day

13th September

<http://www.savethebilbyfund.com/national-bilby-day.php>

World Habitat Day

5th October

<http://www.un.org/en/events/habitatday/>

National Water Week

18th – 24th October

<http://www.awa.asn.au/nationalwaterweek/>

World Fisheries Day

21st November

http://www.gdrc.org/doyourbit/21_11-fisheries-day.html

NPAQ Events

Annual General Meeting

The National Parks Association of Queensland Inc. will host its Annual General Meeting at Mt Coot-tha Botanical Gardens Auditorium on **16 September 2015 at 5:30pm.**

NPAQ President, Michelle Prior, invites all members to attend the AGM. A report of the past financial year's activities will be presented, and the Council elected for the coming year.

Please visit <http://www.npaq.org.au/BookingRetrieve.aspx?ID=188421> for the agenda.

Annual Awards Dinner

Wednesday 16 September

Location: Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens Auditorium

Celebrate the achievements of your association, whilst enjoying the NPAQ Annual Awards Dinner, directly following the AGM.

This year, our guest speaker NPAQ life member Tony Groom will present on "National Parks around the World and Into the Future".

Romeo Lahey Awards will be presented to members who have reached the magical mark of 50 years of NPAQ membership.

Cost \$30 per person.

RSVP by Wednesday 9th September via the NPAQ website <http://www.npaq.org.au/BookingRetrieve.aspx?ID=188424> or by post, phone or email.

Kangaroo Island and the Murray River

Wednesday 21 October

Location: Mt Coot-tha Botanic Gardens Auditorium from 7.45pm

An evening with Len and Laurelle Lowry on their most recent adventure to the mighty Murray River and fascinating Kangaroo Island. KI hosts a national park, several conservation parks and in 2009 was declared part of Tourism Australia's National Landscapes program.

Vale

Our sincere condolences to the families of the members below who have recently passed away:

Roderick Allen
Agnes Crossley
Syble Livermore
David Pollack
Colin Rees
Margaret Reye

Letter to the Editor

Walking in Cunningham's Footsteps

A magnificent day immersed in history and a good walking challenge was had by 28 members and guests tracing the route followed by Allan Cunningham on his expedition when he visited this area on 11th June 1827. NPAQ was privileged to be hosted by Spicers Lodge, the owners of the property which borders Main Range National Park.

The group set off from the camping spot on the upper reaches of Freestone Creek and traversed the northern flanks of the lateral ridge which extends westward from Spicers Peak. We arrived at the high knoll from where Cunningham was able to take bearings on both Cunninghams Gap and Spicers Gap and Flinders Peak just before 11.00am – the time that Cunningham made his observations 188 years ago. A number of the participants were able to confirm Cunningham's bearings on Flinders Peak. From here we followed Cunningham's route along the lateral ridge to the east for around 8km until we reached the plateau where Spicers Lodge is now situated. From here it is possible to see Mt Warning – the other key feature which was known by Cunningham and allowed him to accurately confirm his position.

Despite the large group, we were able to be at this position just slightly later than the 3pm time that Cunningham made his observations. At this time we were able to relax and enjoy the fine afternoon tea provided by Spicers Lodge staff around the large fire pit, rather than head off back to our camp way down to the west as Cunningham did.

The terrain is steep with some challenging climbs for the participants but all made it without distress. A good variety of birds and plants were observed along the way, and a number of brumbies had been there earlier in the day. The lack of lantana and other weeds were a noted feature of the Spicers Nature Reserve. The NPAQ Activities Committee is very grateful for the support of participants in this special event.

Athol Lester
NPAQ Activities Convenor

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www.npaq.org.au

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Julie, 2014

Thank you so much. We have really enjoyed your company, as well as your guiding and assistance. It has been a terrific experience.
Cheryl, 2015

It really was life-enriching.
Roslyn, 2015

The chance to relax and take it easy after a long satisfying day of walking was food for my soul.
Marilyn, 2014



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