protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

Paradise Adrift

Commercial developments in national parks

PLUS

Scientists urge rethink on Australia's Marine Park Plans

ALSO FEATURED

Daintree National Park

Barron Gorge NP lower section

Bridled Nailtail Wallaby

National Parks Association of Queensland Inc.

connect and protect

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Contents

Editorial team

Jeannie Rice and Marika Strand.

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Contributors, please include contact details and brief personal summary. Articles can be submitted via email or hard copy. Digital photos should be minimum 300dpi.

Cover image

Cape Tribulation section, Daintree National Park.

Photo: Marika Strand

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Graeme Bartrim
President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

The National Parks Association of Queensland has an impressive history and has achieved much for its members, supporters and for state conservation.

With the recent changing of councillors it is timely to recognise the significant contributions made by Michelle Prior, Tony O'Brien, Graham Riddell, Athol Lester and Richard Proudfoot. Their passion for national parks and hard work in consolidating the Association and focusing on its objectives is obvious and much appreciated.

For those councillors continuing and to those members taking up positions for the first time, your commitment is valued.

National parks are a comparatively new concept having a history of 145 years. The United States Congress established the first national park in 1872 at Yellowstone.

Locally, Royal National Park was established in NSW in 1879, at Belair in South Australia in 1891, and at Wilson's Promontory in Victoria in 1898 - all prior to Australia's federation. Queensland's first national park was dedicated at Witches Falls in 1908.

The vision of those who worked for and supported these early national parks is impressive.

These declarations were made at a time when human numbers were much smaller then now (the US approximately 76 million and Australia 4 million around 1900), and human induced changes to the landscape were much less significant than today.

The long term values of national parks were recognized as eloquently stated in the Act that created the US National Parks Service in 1916: "*... purpose is to conserve the scenery of the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations*".

Clockwise from top: *Rex Creek at Mossman Gorge, Daintree National Park; Cape Tribulation, Daintree National Park.*

PHOTOS: MARIKA STRAND

Since these times there have been other periods of focus on and growth in the national park estate with vision and much hard work applied.

Today, there is fierce competition for land resources as evidenced by a tenure/leasehold map of Queensland. Most of the state is overlain by one and at times overlapping resource or other tenures which convey resource rights.

Land use conflicts are common and political and economic decisions are often heavily influenced by perceived short term benefits (as Michelle Prior stated in the last issue of Protected, the state budget for national parks focused heavily on enhancing tourist access with not much consideration remaining for protecting/enhancing long term natural values of parks).

It seems that we are in a period where short term thinking dominates our decisions. The 24-hour news cycle, 3-4 year election cycles, annual budgets and annual reports govern our thinking. We need a return to long term thinking for future generations and maintaining the diversity of species with whom we share the planet.

PARADISE ADRIFT

Commercial developments in national parks

Michelle Prior
Immediate Past President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

To most people, the gazettal of national park land implies protection forever, something safeguarded and cherished. Not as a land bank for private developers, something to be chipped away, a lease here and a lease there, followed by a revocation.

A proposal for Lindeman Island by White Horse Australia Lindeman Pty, currently before the Coordinator-General, includes:

- redevelopment and expansion of the existing resort to include a 5-star Beach Resort, 6 star Spa Resort, a 5 star Eco Resort and Tourist Villa Precincts;
- facilities including a conference centre, beach club, restaurants and lounges;
- a central village precinct comprising restaurants, bar, night club, conference facility buildings, arrival centre, shops, sport and recreation centre and a staff village;
- expansion of the current services area;
- existing airstrip and golf course upgrades;
- upgrade to the existing jetty and additional moorings;
- ecotourism facilities - a National Park and Great Barrier Reef Educational Centre and 30 "glamping" facilities located within the national park;
- the "rearrangement" of lease boundaries, including revocation of part of the Lindeman Islands National Park.

Lindeman Island is a part of the Lindeman Group of islands that form Lindeman Islands National Park. It was proclaimed as a national park in 1941, and is a Great Barrier Reef national park within the Whitsundays in the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area.

If approved in its current form, the proposal would revert to days gone by - allowing excision of parts of Great Barrier Reef island national parks for private tourism development. This places private interests above the public interest, and potentially contravenes the management principles for national parks set out in the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

Whilst being well aware of the value of tourism to the Queensland economy, and the dire state of several defunct island resorts, NPAQ calls for smarter, sustainable long term thinking and planning that showcases the Great Barrier Reef island national parks. There has been a lengthy history of economic failure, extensive damage from cyclones, high cost of construction and operation on island resorts highlighted by the current existence of several derelict resorts on Great Barrier Reef islands.

Increasing the development footprint on a national park island in the Great Barrier Reef requires very careful consideration, strategic planning, stringent approval conditions and effective compliance enforcement.

Developers have long been proposing significant expansion of development on Lindeman Island on the grounds of economic viability:

- 1986 (unsuccessful proposed revocation and sale of 390 ha national park land for resort development, marinas, high rise hotels, jet airstrip and condominiums);
- 1987 (unsuccessful proposal for a major resort development on two leases of national park land);
- 1988/89 (30-year lease of 60 ha of national park issued for an 18-hole golf course, as the existing golf course was required for extra accommodation – to NPAQ's knowledge, only a 9 hole golf course was constructed.

Although Club Med undertook a major expansion and reconstruction in 1995, following the Global Financial Crash (GFC) in 2008, Cyclone Ului in 2010 and Cyclone Yasi on 2011, Club Med resort closed in 2012 – citing a post GFC tourism downturn and cyclone damage among the causes.

Tourism resorts in Queensland are an uncertain proposition. In 1997, Dunk, Bedarra and Brampton Island resorts were sold well below the asking price. In 1998, Lindeman, Daydream, South Molle and Hook Islands were amongst a string of Queensland tourist resorts sold for a fraction of development cost – reflecting uncertainty in the tourism market and a hangover of poor business decisions in the 1980s. In 2011, cyclone damaged Dunk and Bedarra Islands were sold at a low price. In 2012, Lindeman Island was again sold for a lower than expected price.

In 2016, only 13 out of 24 resorts on leasehold land in the Great Barrier Reef were open. Nine of the remaining 11 were planning redevelopment, and the other two were subject to negotiation for their future.

As with several other national park island resort leases (Hinchinbrook, Brampton, Hook Islands), Lindeman Island resort has now been out of operation for an extended period of time (five years) – leaving defunct and deteriorating tourism assets on state owned land. This is an unacceptable situation, particularly given that several leases are excised out of national park land in the first instance and are located within the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area. Yet the only response by the tourism sector and State government is perpetuating this sad cycle of 'building better and bigger', followed by ruin amidst natural splendour.

The section of national park proposed for revocation is currently a rolling term lease which commenced in November 1989 for the purpose of a golf course.

The lease expires in October 2019, and is subject to a further 30 years.

Queenslanders do not take kindly to proposals to revoke sections of national parks, particularly for private commercial purposes. Doing so sends a clear message to developers – that Queensland national parks are not in fact protected, but are a saleable commodity. Sadly, this has occurred before. In 1961, the Nicklin (Country Party) Government revoked Hayman Island National Park for a tourism lease. At the time, the then Minister for Agriculture and Forestry (responsible for national parks) stated: "….if a case arises where the progress of the State will be enhanced by excising a small area of national park we will not hesitate to excise it".

The proposal also sets in train a dangerous snowball effect – a lease is granted within a national park for tourism purposes, the land is subsequently degraded, then both the lease and degradation are used as arguments for revocation from the national park estate.

If approved, the current Lindeman Island resort expansion proposal would allow the:

- revocation of 36.9 ha of national park tenure;
- loss of 40% of the only Endangered Broad-leaf Tea Tree community (Melaleuca viridiflora) on the Whitsunday Islands Group; and
- substantially reduced buffers between Critically Endangered Coastal Vine Thicket and resort development and activities.

A more efficient and compact design of the resort avoids most of these impacts. NPAQ calls on the Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef, to reject the proposed revocation of 36.9 ha of national park land on Lindeman Island, and avoid direct and indirect impacts to sensitive vegetation communities, by ensuring a more efficient and compact project design.

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Images: *Lindeman Island and existing resort development*

PHOTOS: *MACKAY CONSERVATION GROUP*

MORE THAN 1,200 SCIENTISTS URGE RETHINK ON AUSTRALIA'S MARINE PARK PLANS

Jessica Meeuwig,
Professor & Director, Marine Futures Lab, University of Western Australia

The following is a statement from the Ocean Science Council of Australia, an internationally recognised independent group of university-based Australian marine researchers, and signed by 1,286 researchers from 45 countries and jurisdictions, in response to the federal government's draft marine parks plans.

We, the undersigned scientists, are deeply concerned about the future of the Australian Marine Parks Network and the apparent abandoning of science-based policy by the Australian government.

On July 21, 2017, the Australian government released draft management plans that recommend how the Marine Parks Network should be managed. These plans are deeply flawed from a science perspective.

Of particular concern to scientists is the government's proposal to significantly reduce high-level or "no-take" protection (Marine National Park Zone IUCN II), replacing it with partial protection (Habitat Protection Zone IUCN IV), the benefits of which are at best modest but more generally have been shown to be inadequate.

The 2012 expansion of Australia's Marine Parks Network was a major step forward in the conservation of marine biodiversity, providing protection to habitats and ecological processes critical to marine life. However, there were flaws in the location of the parks and their planned protection levels, with barely 3% of the continental shelf, the area subject to greatest human use, afforded high-level protection status, and most of that of residual importance to biodiversity.

The government's 2013 Review of the Australian Marine Parks Network had the potential to address these flaws and strengthen protection. However, the draft management plans have proposed severe reductions in high-level protection of almost 400,000 square kilometres – that is, 46% of the high-level protection in the marine parks established in 2012.

Commercial fishing would be allowed in 80% of the waters within the marine parks, including activities assessed by the government's own risk assessments as incompatible with conservation. Recreational fishing would occur in 97% of Commonwealth waters up to 100km from the coast, ignoring the evidence documenting the negative impacts of recreational fishing on biodiversity outcomes.

Under the draft plans:

- The Coral Sea Marine Park, which links the iconic Great Barrier Reef Marine Park to the waters of New Caledonia's Exclusive Economic Zone (also under consideration for protection), has had its Marine National Park Zones (IUCN II) reduced in area by approximately 53% (see map below)
- Six of the largest marine parks have had the area of their Marine National Park Zones IUCN II reduced by between 42% and 73%
- Two marine parks have been entirely stripped of any high-level protection, leaving 16 of the 44 marine parks created in 2012 without any form of Marine National Park IUCN II protection.

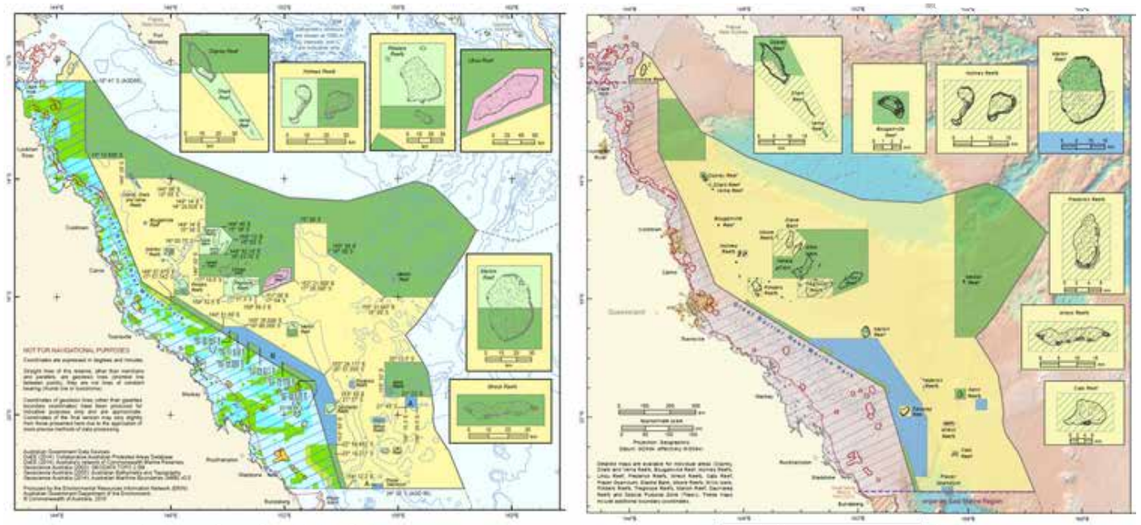
The replacement of high-level protection with partial protection is not supported by science. The government's own economic analyses also indicate that such a reduction in protection offers little more than marginal economic benefits to a very small number of commercial fishery licence-holders.

Retrograde step

This retrograde step by Australia's government is a matter of both national and international significance. Australia has been a world leader in marine conservation for decades, beginning with the establishment of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in the 1970s and its expanded protection in 2004.

At a time when oceans are under increasing pressure from overexploitation, climate change, industrialisation, and plastics and other forms of pollution, building resilience through highly protected Marine National Park IUCN II Zones is well supported by decades of science. This research documents how high-level protection conserves biodiversity, enhances fisheries and assists ecosystem recovery, serving as essential reference areas against which areas that are subject to human activity can be compared to assess impact.

The establishment of a strong backbone of high-level protection within Marine National Park Zones throughout Australia's Exclusive Economic Zone would be a scientifically based contribution to the protection of intact marine ecosystems globally. Such protection is consistent with the move by many countries, including Chile, France, Kiribati, New Zealand, Russia, the UK and US to establish very large no-take marine reserves. In stark contrast, the implementation of the government's draft management plans would see Australia become the first nation to retreat on ocean protection.



Proposed Coral Sea Marine Park zoning, as recommended by independent review (left) and in the new draft plan (right), showing the proposed expansion of partial protection (yellow) vs full protection (green). From http://www.environment.gov.au/marinereservesreview/reports and https://parksaustralia.gov.au/marine/management/draft-plans/

Australia's oceans are a global asset, spanning tropical, temperate and Antarctic waters. They support six of the seven known species of marine turtles and more than half of the world's whale and dolphin species. Australia's oceans are home to more than 20% of the world's fish species and are a hotspot of marine endemism. By properly protecting them, Australia will be supporting the maintenance of our global ocean heritage.

The finalisation of the Marine Parks Network remains a remarkable opportunity for the Australian government to strengthen the levels of Marine National Park Zone IUCN II protection and to do so on the back of strong evidence. In contrast, implementation of the government's retrograde draft management plans undermines ocean resilience and would allow damaging activities to proceed in the absence of proof of impact, ignoring the fact that a lack of evidence does not mean a lack of impact. These draft plans deny the science-based evidence.

We encourage the Australian government to increase the number and area of Marine National Park IUCN II Zones, building on the large body of science that supports such decision-making. This means achieving a target of at least 30% of each marine habitat in these zones, which is supported by Australian and international marine scientists and affirmed by the 2014 World Parks Congress in Sydney and the IUCN Members Assembly at the 2016 World Conservation Congress in Hawaii.

You can read a fully referenced version of the science statement (http://oceanssciencecouncil.org/statement/), and see the list of signatories here (http://oceanssciencecouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/OSCA-science-statement-2017_09_20.pdf).

This article was originally published on The Conversation. Read the original article (https://theconversation.com/more-than-1-200-scientists-urge-rethink-on-australias-marine-park-plans-84366)

Banner image: *Scott Ruzzene on Unsplash*

PARK IN FOCUS

Daintree National Park

Dr David Tng and Dr Deborah Apgaua
James Cook University

The Daintree has garnered the reputation for being "Where the rainforest meets the reef". But what is actually so special and unique about the Daintree?

While the Australian Wet Tropics is famous for rainforest, this article will examine what is found within the rainforests of the Daintree that makes the place truly extraordinary.

Forest Fairyland

The Daintree National Park is divided into two sections: the southern section, comprising the Mossman Gorge area, and the northern Cape Tribulation section, bound roughly by the Daintree river in the south, and the Bloomfield river in the north.

This article focuses on the northern section.

Getting to the Cape Tribulation section of Daintree National Park is a 1.5hr scenic drive from Cairns, to the crossing at the Daintree River. After a short barge trip across the river, the world of everyday life peels away, and a forest fairyland realm begins.

The Daintree River is home to 31 species of mangroves (almost half of all mangrove species in the world). The Daintree mangroves also harbour a wide variety of mangrove-associated plants, such as orchids and other interesting epiphytic *Myrmecodia* ant-plants (plants with adaptations for housing ants) that hang from the trunks of the mangrove trees.

The mangrove forests transition into freshwater swamp forest where salt water does not infiltrate, but soils are still poorly drained. Here you will find giant weeping paperbark trees (*Melaleuca leucadendra*), grand screwpines (*Pandanus spp*.), colonies of Alexandra Palms (*Archontophoenix alexandrae*), and the 2-4m tall sedge (*Scirpodendron ghaeri*), with its long saw-edged leaves.

Towards the sea, the soils become sandier and better drained. Mangroves and swamp forests are replaced by littoral forests and sandy beach vegetation. This is some of the most untouched tropical beach forest vegetation in the world, with Alexandrian Laurels (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), Beach Barringtonias (*Barringtonia asiatica*) and Coastal She-oaks (*Casuarina equisetifolia*) dominating. Out on more exposed coastal rocky locations, such as Cape Tribulation, coastal woodlands exist amongst the gum and bloodwood trees.

However, the rainforest is where the true treasures of the Daintree lie.

In the humid lowland rainforests of the Daintree, the most conspicuous lifeforms are trees. Tall hardwood trees of red tulip oak, red cedar, spurwood and black bean may tower over 45m, some with tall plank buttresses characteristic of tropical trees. Outsizing these, are the giant canopy emergents of Milky Pines (*Alstonia scholaris*), and colossal strangler figs.

The yellow mahogany (*Dysoxylum parasiticum*) and bumpy satinash (*Syzygium cormiflorum*) present another archetype of tropical forests – the curious bearing of flowers and fruits on their trunks, known as cauliflory.

Epiphytes such as birds nest ferns, elk horn ferns, tassel ferns and orchids live in the tall branches or trunks of their arboreal hosts. Some epiphytes climb up the trees towards the light, using their roots to hold onto the bark of their hosts. While other tree dwellers tap into their hosts' vascular system for nutrients via parasitic connections.

Palm trees are a conspicuous component of the canopy and midstorey. The Daintree is famous for fan palms (*Licuala ramsayi*), which in some places dominate the canopy. Black palms (*Normanbya normanbyi*) common only in the Daintree, have one of the hardest wood of all palm species. Tree ferns (*Cyathea spp.*) and tree cycads add texture to the rainforest understorey.

Other lifeforms make use of the spaces beneath the canopy. Lianas such as blood vines (*Austrosteenisia spp.*) with monstrous twisted stems, and "wait-a-while" climbing palms with their recurved spiky tendrils, are in abundance.

The filtered light of the forest floor provides habitat for understorey herbs, native gingers, leafless root parasites, ferns and mosses. While scattered around, the seedlings of giant trees lay in wait of the demise and fall of a nearby tree to release them from their shade-imposed dwarfism.

Botanical Ark

The Daintree is a botanical paradise. Over 1500 species of land plants are found just within this small area. Around 30 such species are found nowhere else in the world.

Some of these very rare and endangered species are restricted to single localities, typically along waterways. These pockets of refugia would have been established in historical periods, when the general climate of the region may have been more hostile.

The Daintree is a literal botanical ark!

A place to observe such species, is the Marrdja Botanical Walk along Oliver Creek. A number of rare plants are found here, including the endangered Daintree gardenia (*Gardenia actinocarpa*). This understorey shrub has large white showy flowers and interesting ribbed fruits.

Nearby Noah Creek is habitat for Noah (Creek) tree (*Noahdendron nicholasii*). *Noahdendron* produces a pendant spike of pink flowers, and is a tropical relative of the witch hazels. You will also find the rare Noah's tamarind (*Lepiderema hirsuta*), a native relative of the lychee. It has marvellous sprays of purple leaves during the growing season. While upstream along Noah Creek, is the habitat of the Daintree pine (*Gymnostoma australianum*), a relative of the coastal she-oak.

Cooper Creek is habitat for the endangered satinash tree (*Syzygium glenum*). This little-known satinash is a large, multiple-stemmed tree with brownish pear-shaped fruits. Unlike other satinashes, the fruits of *S. glenum* are hard and leathery, and probably not particularly edible. The tree is found in only a single population in Cooper Creek with only a few mature trees. Another endangered plant *Xanthostemon formosus*, a little known relative of the native golden penda (*Xanthostemon chrysanthus*) is also found here. Both the Cooper Creek penda and the golden penda occur in similar environments beside rivers and streams.

The Wet Tropics is also famous for its'"primitive" or "ancient" plants. These species are primitive in the sense that they are representatives of early seed-bearing plants.

With this in mind, the Daintree has a fair share of "primitives". The idiot fruit (*Idiospermum australiense*) for example, belongs to the *Calycanthaceae* plant family that arose very early in plant evolution. The idiot fruit is so named because botanists were perplexed by the 3 or 4 compartments (seed leaves or cotyledons) of the large seed. At that time, taxonomic classification of flowering plants was based on whether they had either one (mono-) or two (di-) cotyledons. The closest relatives of this tree are found in the warm temperate zones of America and eastern Asia.

Another group of "primitive" plants are the laurel family. In the Daintree, the Noah's walnut (*Endiandra microneura*), Cooper Creek walnut (*E. cooperana*), and Gray's walnut (*E. grayi*) are found nowhere else. Closely related to the laurels is the Cooper Creek Haplostichanthus (*Haplostichanthus ramiflorus*), a shrub of the rainforest understorey. This species, like other members of the custard apple family (*Annonaceae)*, still uphold an ancient alliance with beetles, to help pollinate their flowers.

Animal refuge

Athough few animals are restricted to the Daintree, the forests and the mountain ranges within Daintree National Park represent an important refuge for many of these species.

Sightings of the endangered and flightless cassowary are something to look forward to, as are the more than 400 species of birds that live here. The Daintree is also home to a wide variety of mammals such as the Bennett's tree kangaroo, bandicoots, echidnas, sugar gliders, possums, quolls, antechinuses, platypuses, phascogales, pademelons, rare bats and rats.

Over 20 species of reptilies inhabit the Daintree, including the estuarine crocodile, saw-shelled turtle, various species of snakes, the lace monitor, Boyd's forest dragon, and almost 20 species of skinks. Among the skinks, the Thornton Peak Calyptotis (*Calyptotis thorntonensis*) has a very restricted distribution to an area on Thornton Peak.

Amphibians of the Daintree are perhaps the most vulnerable. Around 25 species of frogs are found in the national park, and many of these are confined to the higher mountain areas, where the effects of climate change may bear down on them harshly.

For the small area it occupies, the Daintree National Park ranks among one of the most diverse spots on earth, not just in species, but also in the range of habitats that can be encountered within a short distance.

Indeed, the Daintree rainforests represent Australia's last bastion of what used to cover a much larger part of the tropics.

Banner: *Cape Tribulation, Daintree National Park. Inset: Flower and seed of Idiospermum australiense.*
PHOTOS: MARIKA STRAND; DR DAVID TNG & DR DEBORAH APGAUA

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FEATURED WALK

Barron Gorge National Park lower section, via Speewah Conservation Park

Travis Teske
Tablelands Bushwalking Club

Barron Gorge National Park extends from the coast to the Atherton Tablelands and is part of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area. The Traditional Owners of the area are the Djabugay Aboriginal people.

Speewah Conservation Park (15.2ha) is on land donated to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services by Ron and Pam Elgar in 2004 and is adjacent to Barron Gorge National Park.

It is the nearest camping area to Barron Gorge National Park. The amenities block is wheelchair accessible and has cold showers. There are also two gas barbecues. A camping permit is required.

The closest town with all amenities is Kuranda, just 40 minutes northwest from Cairns. Speewah has a tavern and small grocery store.

Access to the walks in this part of the national park are via Speewah Conservation Park. Ample car parking is available at the trail head. There are no toilet facilities or water points on the tracks.

All the walking tracks in this section of the park are through tropical rainforest which feature cadagi trees (*Corymbia torelliana*), kauri pine (*Agathis robusta*) and wait-a-while (*Acacia cuspidifolia*). If you are lucky you may see possums, tree-kangaroos, birds, butterflies and the southern cassowary.

There are many different tracks in this area. All are signposted with their names and distances. A sign board and map at the entrance details the tracks and distances. Many of the walk names acknowledge the Aboriginal history of this area.

The first section, Djina-Wu, is 765m from the information board at the Speewah camping area car park to the Douglas Track. It is an easy walk through the rainforest along a well-defined track, over boardwalks and a bridge until you reach the junction of the Douglas and Smiths tracks. All of these junctions are well signposted with distances to the next junction. The Douglas and Smiths tracks are early historic tracks which lead from the coast to the tablelands behind Cairns.

Location

Barron Gorge National Park and adjacent Speewah Conservation Park

Recommended access

Speewah camp ground, Smith Tracks Road, Speewah

Grade

Moderate

Time allowance

Five hours (return)

Highlights

Views over the northern beaches of Cairns from Glacier Rock. Walking through tropical rainforest with specimens of cadagi trees and tall kauri pines.

Continue along the Douglas track and after 2km there is a junction for the Gandal wandun track. Pass by this for the moment. This part of the track is undulating but nothing too steep. There are some dry gullies to cross. Care does need to be taken in this area due to exposed tree roots. They can become slippery if there is moisture about. Along this section many cassowary droppings can be seen.

After the Gandal wandun junction it is another 1.75km to the Glacier Rock turn off. Here the track becomes rocky and steeper and the vegetation changes to a drier bushland. The turn off is to the right. After 260m is the lookout from Glacier Rock. From here there are views over Stoney Creek, Mount Whitfield and the coastline over the Coral Sea. It is possible to also see parts of the Cairns Kuranda railway and see and hear the tourist train if the timing is right.

Then retrace your steps to the junction of the Gandal wandun track and follow it for 2.875km to reach Cadagi Corner. Once again this track passes through rainforest with some undulations but nothing too taxing. Cadagi Corner is so named because of the cadagi trees (*Corymbia torelliana*) growing there, which are easily recognised by their smooth green trunks.

Head back to the Speewah camping area car park along the Smiths Track. The first 1.1km section of this track is an old logging track which ascends gradually. Keep an eye out for the stately kauri pines (*Agathis robusta*) which are also easily recognised by their trunks. The track passes through the park boundary gate then turns right and it is a further 2.1km back to the car park.

This is a pleasant 5-hour walk, including stops to eat. Take your time to enjoy the rainforest and listening to the birds calling.

Wear sturdy walking shoes and bring ample water. Pack food if you want an unhurried day's walk. A camera is always handy for that unexpected shot. There are often wonderful sights of fungi sprouting from the fallen rotting timber, amazing bark textures and lichen and moss fields.

Clockwise from top: *The rainforest in Barron Gorge National Park; the view from Glacier Rock; a kauri pine.* PHOTOS: TRAVIS TESKE

Be aware that often trees, vines or wait-a-while tendrils can come down before a ranger can clear the track. Near the start of the walk there is an information sign and a warning about the stinging tree (more of a low bush). Contact with this bush will leave a very painful sting.

Walks can be done at any time but the wet season makes it more difficult with slippery, wet boardwalks, tree roots and rocks.

Walkers could spend several days camping at Speewah Conservation Park and exploring the day tracks in the area. Because there are many tracks in this area, you can attempt shorter or longer circuits, ranging from easy to moderate, depending on your level of fitness.

Other walks of interest in the area include:

- McDonalds track (4.8km one way) – This is a moderate track with some steep sections and links Wrights Lookout to the Douglas Track. There are views over Barron Gorge and Barron Falls, as well as to the coast, where the trail meets the Douglas Track. The crossing of Surprise Creek is very pretty.
- Douglas Track (5km one way) – From Stoney Creek (a good place to visit and swim) the Douglas trailhead gradually climbs through rainforest on part of the historic construction track of the Cairns to Kuranda Railway. There are remains of a stone-pitched wall and an old mango tree where a bridge crosses over the railway line. If the timing is right, wave to the train passengers below as they travel up to Kuranda. The soil turns to a red clay as the track continues upwards via a series of switchbacks in open country to the junction with the McDonalds track and then onto Glacier Rock.

The author has endeavoured to ensure that the information presented here is as accurate as possible. However, they or NPAQ do not accept responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any person guided by this article.

WILDLIFE FEATURE

Bridled Nailtail Wallaby *(Onychogalea fraenata)*

Megan Adams
Bachelor of Wildlife Science, University of Queensland

The bridled nailtail wallaby (*Onychogalea fraenata*) is endangered in Queensland (*Nature Conservation Act 1992*) and nationally (*Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation 1999*).

It is a small wallaby with a distinctive white 'bridle' strip running from the centre of the back along the shoulders to behind the forearms.

It is one of three species that have a 'nail tail'. This refers to the horny 'pointed nail' at the end of the tail. It is unknown what purpose this 'nail tail' serves, however, it is thought it might aid in pivoting while running and making quick turns.

The bridled nailtail was thought to be extinct from the 1930's, until its rediscovery nearly 40 years later in 1973 by a fencing contractor. The contractor had recently read in article about the extinction of the species, and quickly reported that he had seen a population of nailtails near the town of Dingo in the Central Highlands region of Queensland.

It was confirmed by members of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service team that there was in fact a population of the wallabies living in this area. In 1979 the area was declared Taunton National Park (Scientific) to conserve and increase the population of bridled nailtails.

The population of bridled nailtails at Taunton National Park has grown from less than a hundred to now over 200 individuals. Part of this success is the constant effort of controlling predation by wild dogs, dingoes and cats through baiting programs.

Part of the recovery process has been to successfully establish a captive breeding colony (1991) to reintroduce populations at nearby Idalia National Park and Avocet Nature Refuge. Both populations of bridled nailtails are now self-sustaining and mating successfully. Now the goal is to protect and enhance these populations.

Clockwise from top: *Rangers at a control site for buffel grass management, Taunton National Park; Bridled nailtail wallaby.*

IMAGES: PAUL DONATIU (TOP), QUEENSLAND MUSEUM, GARY CRANITCH (ABOVE)

In 1993, a bridled nailtail recovery team comprising of non-profit Fitzroy Basin Association, various other organizations, state and federal governments, as well as landholders, developed a management plan to help with the conservation of the species.

The recovery team also monitors and manages both native and pest plant species. Taunton contains 12 different regional ecosystems, four of which are listed as endangered and two as of concern under the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection's biodiversity status.

Not only do these habitats have their own significant conservation value, but they provide vital habitat for the only naturally occurring population of endangered bridled nailtail wallabies. Through conservation of these vegetation communities, and removal of invasive buffel grass, the recovery team ensures the key species that provide food and shelter for the wallabies are available.

The success of the recovery program for endangered bridled nailtails, including the protection their habitat as Taunton National Park, highlights how important the role of national parks are in the conservation of threatened species.

References

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The State of Queensland (Department of Environment and Heritage Protection). 2017. Bridled nailtail wallaby. [ONLINE] Available at: https://www.ehp.qld.gov.au/wildlife/threatened-species/endangered/endangered-animals/bridled_nailtail_wallaby.html. [Accessed 9 October 2017].

THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

Personal reflection on why our parks must be valued

Graeme Bartrim
President, National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ)

Thanks to the company that I worked for supporting the construction of the predator proof fence for bilbies at Currawinya National Park, an opportunity arose in Easter 2001 to take my children Hannah, Julia, Hamish and Sarah right out west.

The completion of the fence was to be celebrated and quite a few people were converging on Currawinya. My four children and I set off and over time the roads became increasingly straight, traffic decreased and the dominance of Eucalypts gave way to Acacias. My oldest daughter who was a learner driver at the time was able to clock up quite a few hours.

We arrived at the park where a group of enthusiastic people had established facilities for the influx of visitors. The park landscape was very different to the coastal country familiar to my children. Red sandy soil was plentiful, ground cover sparse, the overstorey was reduced in height and a lake was a little salty. Living more basically and waiting for the old boiler to heat up shower water added to the children's sense of mystery.

The building of the enclosure and removal of feral animals in such an isolated location was quite a feat and the dedication and enthusiasm of the park's personnel was obvious.

A highlight for the children was to get close to a couple of bilbies under the supervision of park people who treated the endearing creatures with great care and affection. The children's eyes grew large as they enjoyed the company of the little marsupials.

Another fond memory is our finding an old bed base one evening and the five of us lying across it looking into an overwhelming night sky with the occasional shooting star and enjoying conversation.

Clockwise from top: *A lake at Currawinya National Park; a section of the predator-proof fence at Currawinya; a bilby.*

PHOTOS: PAUL DONATIU (TOP & ABOVE); NPAQ ARCHIVES (BELOW)

This experience helped cement my children's interest in and concern for the natural world. As a parent it is gratifying to hear them now as independent adults discussing bird observations or weed control and raising broader issues such as animal rights, waste minimisation and human population.

The visit was also a reminder of the amount of work that is required within established national parks to maintain its specific values.

RANGER OF THE MONTH

Insights into the diverse backgrounds and day-to-day activities of Queensland's park rangers

Tayce Cook
Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS)

Tayce Cook is a Marine Park Ranger with the Northern Great Barrier Reef region. She remembers boating with her dad in Moreton Bay when she was a kid, seeing the Marine Park Rangers working around the bay, and knowing that that was the job she wanted.

How long have you worked in national parks?

I've worked as a Marine Parks Ranger for nearly six years. I love working in and around the water, knowing that I am helping to protect and maintain one of the most important natural wonders in Australia—the Great Barrier Reef. I also love being able to share my passion for the environment with visitors to the park.

Which parks have you worked in?

I've worked as a Park Ranger with the loggerhead turtles at Mon Repos; and also as a Conservation Officer, checking marine park permits in Moreton Bay Marine Park. For the last three years I've been based in Cairns as a Marine Park Ranger. Previously, I was also Wildlife Ranger with the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection, based in Rockhampton and also Cairns.

What has been your most memorable moment?

There have been many since I have started working in the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park region! But I can't go past the time when we were out doing reef health assessments and a pod of common bottlenose dolphins swam up to us in the water. More than 20 dolphins surrounded us,

QPWS ranger Tayce Cook on lizard island (above).

PHOTOS: QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT (ABOVE) & JEREMY BISHOP (TOP)

making a complex array of noises. They were very interactive and playful, and stayed with us for a long time.

Can you describe your favourite national parks experience?

On a flat calm day during the winter whale season, walking up the steep track to the summit of Fitzroy Island can be amazing. The views over the island and mainland are incredible and, if you're lucky enough, you can see the humpback whales swimming past on their annual migration into our warm reef waters from the Antarctic. It's well worth the hike up to the top.

What is the best part about working in a national park?

The beauty of working in our marine parks region is in its diversity. We have the most amazing islands, rich with culture and biodiversity, which we can camp on and explore. And surrounding the islands, we have the Great Barrier Reef, internationally significant for its beauty and incredible diversity. I take every opportunity I get to jump into the water—anything from cleaning and inspecting public moorings to monitoring coral reef health. For me, it's the best part of my job.

What is your top tip for visitors to parks for bushwalking?

Well, it gets pretty hot up in far north Queensland, especially during summer, so make sure you pack plenty of water. And don't forget to take a camera to capture the astounding views!

What is your top tip for campers?

Camping on islands means you don't always have access to the facilities (such as shops!) that are available on the mainland. Research our web site for everything you need to know, then plan for those conditions and you can't go wrong!

NPAQ thanks Tayce for taking time to answer our questions. We appreciate the work all QPWS rangers undertake in protecting Queensland's national parks.

WHAT'S ON

NPAQ activities

Community Conservation - D'Aguilar National Park

Get your hands dirty! Come and spend a couple of hours to help with lantana control and revegetation work

Date: Saturday, October 21

Meet: Jollys Lookout carpark in D'Aguilar National Park

Cost: Free

Leader: Angus McElnea (0429 854 446 or gus_mcelnea@hotmail.com)

Birding at Sandy Camp Bushland Reserve, Wynnum

This area is known for the many species of birds found amongst a range of environments, including the reed beds, open water holes, scrub and grassy areas. There is a viewing shelter overlooking one the waterholes.

For a Christmas morning tea, we will move to the Wynnum foreshore.

Please bring a plate of goodies to share.

Date: Sunday, November 19

Meet: Sandy Camp Road carpark.UBD map 142 Q16

Grade: Easy

Cost: $5

Leader: Lesley Joyce (blwrgl@gmail.com, 0423 109 788, 3818 7646)

The 6th Clif Bell Memorial Picnic

The 6th Clif Bell Memorial Picnic, Ellanora Park, Wynnum.

The Picnic will follow the bird group walk commencing at 9.30am.

Date: Sunday, November 19

Meet: Ellanora Park, Wynnum. UBD map 143 H14. East of Crown St, Wynnum

Cost: Free

Leader: Ian Peacock (0416 943 280, 3359 0318 or ianpeacock@hotmail.com)

Community Conservation - D'Aguilar National Park

Get your hands dirty! Come and spend a couple of hours to help with lantana control and revegetation work

Date: Saturday, November 18

Meet: Jollys Lookout carpark in D'Aguilar National Park

Cost: Free

Leader: Angus McElnea (0429 854 446 or gus_mcelnea@hotmail.com)

New Year Twilight Celebration Date Claimer

Date: 7 January 2018

Further details and venue to be advised

Leaders: Len and Laurelle Lowry

NPAQ events

NPAQ Member's Meeting

The last NPAQ member's meeting for the year will be held:

Date: Wednesday, November 15

Time: 7.15pm for 7.30pm start

Venue: Brisbane Botanic Gardens Auditorium, Mt Coot-tha

Vale

NPAQ is saddened by the passing in August, of life member Yvette Cramond.

Yvette joined NPAQ in 1946, and she became a Life Member in 2012.

We extend our sincere condolences to Yvette's family and friends.

Image: Daintree Gardenia.
PHOTO: DR DAVID TNG & DR DEBORAH APGAUA

For more information on Activities, visit our website:
www.npaq.org.au/events

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