

protected

Magazine of National Parks Association of Queensland

Our first national park

What can we learn from our national park history?

PLUS

Values based management -
a new approach

ALSO FEATURED

- The struggle for Mount Etna Caves
- Magnetic Island National Park
- The elusive night parrot



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Editorial team

Reece Pianta, Jeannie Rice and Marika Strand.

Contributor guidelines

If you have an idea for a *Protected* article we would love to hear from you. We can help with reviewing, editing and images. Contributions are always welcome. Please email admin@npaq.org.au for a schedule of future editions.

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

A proud history - composite image

Photos: NPAQ Library

Left image: Main Range NP, NPAQ Library

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	Denis McMullen
	Alexsis Wilson

Staff

Business Development Officer	Marika Strand
Communications Officer	Reece Pianta
Conservation Officer	Laura Hahn
Project & Office Administrator	Jeannie Rice

Contact details

Office Post	Unit 10/36 Finchley St, Milton PO Box 1040, Milton QLD 4064
Phone	(07) 3367 0878
Web	www.npaq.org.au
Email	admin@npaq.org.au
ABN	60 206 792 095

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FROM THE PRESIDENT



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

Banner: Hill Inlet lookout over the Whitsundays (NPAQ Library)

5.6% of the state is presently designated national park. These parks were proclaimed usually as a consequence of much hard work by advocates, public servants, in particular parks service personnel since 1975, and with support from senior bureaucrats and politicians.

We are presently at a delicate stage in the history of the state's national parks.

There are specific threats to each park's biodiversity values.

These include feral animals, weeds, overuse and more recently "eco tourism" proposals. National park personnel are typically passionate about nature conservation but also under resourced. There is now a risk of long term degradation to sections of the existing park estate.

The state's biodiversity is not fully represented in the park estate. There is a recognised need to consolidate the estate to

better protect sufficient examples of the state's very diverse flora and fauna.

But there are opportunities:

We await the government's *Protected Area Strategy*. This will be a very important document for the state, setting the direction for park management. It will reflect a decision around conserving biodiversity values and a judgement of what expenditure the state can afford. It is a great opportunity for Queensland to catch up.

The election promise to allocate \$500 million to a Land Restoration Fund has the potential to generate conservation benefits.

And the potential conversion of state forest to national park.

A Pew Charitable Trust funded Galaxy poll found that 84% of Queensland respondents believe that more land should be protected and 75% support at least 20% of the state being in national parks and reserves. This aligns rather well with the Labor party's stated goal of 17%.

Community support for national parks needs to be more visible.

History is a great teacher, so in this issue of *Protected* we look back at a few historical examples of how national parks were won. Neville McMannin remind us how Queensland's first official national park was declared, how a push over many decades opened a successful period of conservation and protected area growth in Queensland. We also examine a more contentious fight - the

campaign to secure the Mount Etna Caves National Park and end mining there. Securing parks is only half the mission, ongoing management is essential, so we also have a contribution from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service on their *Value Based Management Framework*.

The lesson from history for me is securing a national park is never easy and its ongoing management requires research and work - our association has a vital role to play on both fronts. We work towards growing the park estate, improving its management and increasing public awareness of park values. That is why we currently have several fundraisers underway and a \$10 membership offering. Scores of new members from all walks of life have expressed their support for our work - a very heartening achievement. If you are not a member, or know somebody who you think should support our work encourage them to visit npaq.org.au to find out how they can join and get involved.

If you have an article idea - we want to hear from you!

We can help with editing, images and content.
Email us to find out how:
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Queensland's national parks need you too.

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OUR FIRST NATIONAL PARK

Remembering Qld's park pioneers

Neville McManimm
National park history enthusiast

When asked to write on the topic of how we got our first Queensland national park, I pondered it for a day or so and then my mind began to wander. It seems to do that at my age. As a young bushwalker it was my feet that used to wander, but like some things in life, it has gone to my head.

I was once told a tale about how national parks are picked. It was at the bar in parliament house, after a hectic session when polities had to vote on whether they would accept a pay rise recommended by the independent tribunal. One member said "we have got something, so let's give the people something". So he threw a dart at a map of Queensland and where it landed he said, "that is where we will have a national park". Such tales should be treated with a measure of



scepticism.

To me, we got our national parks not just because of legislation passed in parliament, but because we have had, and do have, people who treasure the idea that the stories and beauty around us exist not just for us, but for all the generations to come. This was, and always will be, a continuous battle with those who only see the now in life. This is our goal: to show people the world around us and open their eyes, mind, and heart to the treasures of the great outdoors as they are, unspoilt, without turning them into an artificial theme park for commercial gain.

The first protectors and conservationists in this land were the indigenous Australian peoples. They knew the importance of everything from grass, to trees, to animals, to the layout of the land. All this had a purpose and if we destroy a little part of the environment, it will have a flow on effect. Have you tried to understand the world around you the way they did, and then shown it to others?

The explorer Sir Thomas Mitchell, was the first white man to see and name *Salutar Rosa*. The beauty of the landscape reminded him so much of the Italian baroque painters style. Have you made the time to see the beauty of the country from a creek bank or mountain top, and wished that others will see the same in years to come?

This is the reason for national

parks.

Robert Martin Collins, raised at Mundoolun, near Canungra, saw a lot of our land. He rode on horseback to near Taroom and out west to the Channel Country, from 1873. I and others call him the *Father of Queensland National Parks*. During 1878, Collins and his brother visited national parks in the USA. This no doubt fired him up for the years to come, in his struggle to get protected land reserves in his home land. In 1886 he climbed Mt Barney, and after riding over the yellow pinch, a familiar locality to many more recent visitors, camped on the Logan and the next morning commenced the climb. Our early conservation pioneers created epic stories well worth

To me, we got our national parks not just because of legislation passed in parliament, but because we have had, and do have, people who treasure the idea that the stories and beauty around us exist not just for us, but for all the generations to come.

your further research.

In November 1895, he and others followed Christmas Creek up to the top of the Border Ranges looking down into NSW. In 1896 he gave a talk to the Royal Geographical Society of Qld, describing that walk. Later that same year he became a

Images: banner left: Cunninghams Gap undated, Mt Crookneck 1933, below left: Romeo Lahey 1919, middle: Hinchinbrook undated, right: Bunya Mountains undated (all NPAQ library).

member of the Queensland parliament, gaining a new platform to raise the issue of protecting our land as he had seen done in the USA.

During March 1898, he took the then Queensland Governor, Lord Lamington, walking up Christmas Creek. Finally, in November 1906 legislation was introduced into parliament for an *Act to Preserve State Forest and National Parks* to take effect from 1st January 1907. In March 1908, Witches Falls on Tamborine Mountain became our first official national park.

So in a short version, this is how Queensland got its first national park. We have also had scenic reserves and beauty spots, land usually of smaller area and with far less protection than a fully declared national park.

The scramble was then on for politicians to get parks in their electorates.

In 1908, new parks were declared at Bunya Mountains



and Black Fellows Knob overlooking Condamine Gorge, now part of Queen Mary Falls National Park. 1909 gave us Millstream Falls and Cunningham's Gap National Park.

Sadly, it was after Robert Collins death in 1913, that the Border Ranges he favoured became Lamington National Park in 1915. His dream is fulfilled as generations since, and to come, have and will, enjoy the fruit of his labour.

Romeo Lahey had teamed with Robert Collins to make this dream a reality. Lahey was a young man in his twenties who walked the Border Ranges, taking photos and gaining support from the local electorate on a petition to parliament for a national park on the Border Ranges. This action was successful in securing Lamington National Park, and became a model to create new national parks, deployed by Romeo Lahey and the soon



to be created National Parks Association of Queensland (NPAQ) for decades to come. The original petition can be seen at the Qld State Archives, Box Item 864222.

As NPAQ members will know, this was not the last any Government was to see or hear of Romeo Lahey. He and others founded the National Parks Association of Queensland in 1930 and have been the driving force for creating new national parks and ensuring their ongoing protection.

So, Queensland had its first national parks, though not just by legislation - what really gave us our national parks were the people who treasure the ideal that areas should be preserved in their natural state, unspoilt, not for monetary gain for the few, but for the many and for future generations, not just the present. So, don't slack off! You are there to carry on the dream.

Neville will be presenting a talk at the next NPAQ member's meeting on the subject of NPAQ founder Romeo Lahey.

Details are: Wednesday, May 16, 2018, 7:15pm for 7:30pm start at the NPAQ Office, 10/36 Finchley St, Milton.

BUILDING A LEGACY

VALUES-BASED, ADAPTIVE, TRANSPARENT PARK MANAGEMENT FOR QUEENSLAND

Emma Henderson
Manager – Values-based Management Framework, QPWS

Queensland's national parks contribute to conserving Queensland's rich biological diversity, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage, and European cultural heritage while also providing social and economic benefits to the wider community. At present Queensland boasts over 1,000 protected areas, including five World Heritage sites.

Over 100 years of park management in Queensland has seen a lot of good work done by generations of dedicated park managers. Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) is united by a passion for protecting the environment and managing our world class protected area system so that future generations also have the opportunity to experience these unique and special places.

However, a lot has changed since Queensland declared its first national park in 1908. QPWS now manages many more hectares of protected area across a hugely diverse range of environments and ecosystems. QPWS manages different tenures, from national parks to state forests, and includes over two million hectares of land jointly managed with traditional owners. We welcome more visitors than ever and have a diverse range of stakeholders with growing expectations, and at times conflicting views as to how parks should be managed. Add to this emerging management issues and challenges such as climate change and changing tourism trends; and increasing pressure to demonstrate not only conservation outcomes but also value for money.

Back in 2010 the Queensland Auditor General released a report to Parliament on the sustainable management of national parks and protected areas which identified room for improvement in certain

areas of QPWS' management. In particular, the report outlined recommendations to formalise a comprehensive planning process and ensure a consistent approach to planning that aligned to international best practice protected area guidelines; formalise a monitoring and evaluation framework; and develop appropriate performance indicators that represent the agency's achievements in managing protected areas in line with the objectives of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992*.

The *Values Based Management Framework* (VBMF) was developed in response to these recommendations and was launched on 2 November 2016 during the public consultation phase of the *Hinchinbrook Island National Park Management Plan*. The VBMF is an adaptive management approach which focuses on managing park values. This approach aligns with international best-practice and reflects a global shift towards managing for values, rather than the more traditional approach which focused on managing issues or threats, sometimes blind to the impact they pose to a park's values.

There is no doubt that managing threats is important, however if our aim is to improve the condition of a value then the management focus may need to shift from just managing an element such as fire or a pest species at a park level, to specifically managing threats to the condition of the park's values. For example, a traditional approach to managing pigs on a park may involve broad scale aerial baiting across a landscape. This approach is expensive and often difficult to determine its effectiveness in protecting park values. Under a value focused management program, a targeted approach may involve only baiting the area around key values, for example a spring ecosystem. This approach is likely to reduce costs and allows us to adequately assess

The Values Based Management Framework



its effectiveness by monitoring the condition of the spring over time to determine if impacts from pigs have been reduced. This doesn't mean that other values are forgotten, but rather targets management to identified priorities. Protecting key values such as ecosystems or habitat for threatened species also benefits other values - including species using the same habitat or maintaining aesthetic values for park visitors.

What is the QPWS VBMF?

Park management under the VBMF is a dynamic process, where a cycle of planning, prioritising, doing, monitoring, evaluating, and reporting allows us to adapt our management in a transparent way as we learn more and improve over time. Its focus is on keeping our park values healthy by making sure we identify the key values on every park and then if management is required, targeting our efforts towards those values. All key values will be monitored annually for changes in condition over time, regardless of the management they receive. Monitoring data is then used to assess the effectiveness of the management directions identified in the management plan. In some cases this may mean actively managing certain values while only monitoring others. This allows us to determine if we have got our management right or if we need to adapt what we are doing to achieve the outcomes we want.

The cycle begins with the planning process. A clear understanding of why each park is special is established through a values assessment – often through a workshop involving experts and regional staff. Key values and QPWS's vision for them are identified in the form of a desired outcome. To date, QPWS has undertaken values assessments on approximately 130 parks, which equates to around 30% of the protected area estate managed by QPWS.

Management plans under the VBMF have a different look and feel to previous plans. The new format is designed to provide a succinct overview of all the key values identified for a park, their current and desired condition, along with threats and the condition trend. The plans also identify strategic management directions, which set the high level management direction required to achieve the desired outcome for the value. Thematic strategies sit under management plans and contain further detail and measurable objectives for the on ground management action needed. A resource document will also be developed to capture the park's full context, including a park overview and history as well as a description of the other natural, cultural and

social values. The management plan and resource document are designed to work together to provide the comprehensive planning for a park.

QPWS has adopted this approach to facilitate an adaptive management process. Management plans are intended to be more static direction setting documents which undergo a comprehensive consultation process and are reviewed every five to ten years. More detailed and operational management objectives and actions are then contained in thematic strategies which can be reviewed regularly and specific actions adapted as we assess the effectiveness of our management in achieving our objectives.

The VBMF also introduces a monitoring framework for all key values through annual 'health checks' using a simple, standardised and repeatable methodology. So far health checks have been successfully trialled on a sample of parks. Undertaking health checks on all key values will eventually be incorporated into annual work programs as implementation of the VBMF continues to be rolled out.

Where to next?

In 2018 QPWS will focus on progressing planning under the new

framework for priority and high profile parks and developing a management effectiveness evaluation (MEE) program based on the International Union for Conservation of Nature –World Commission on Protected Areas framework to assist us evaluate our performance as park managers and feed back into the management cycle, allowing us to continuously refine and improve our management.

QPWS is also gearing up to release a Queensland State of the Parks (QSOP) report based on the values assessment data collected through implementing the framework to date. This initial report will provide a snap-shot of the key values and their desired outcomes, along with the current condition and threats to these values, for a selection of parks across the state.

Looking into the future, the QSOP will be the primary mechanism for reporting on how well Queensland's protected area estate is being managed at the state-wide level; and our effectiveness in protecting key values and achieving management goals. Future QSOP reports will include outcomes of the QPWS MEE program.

QPWS' vision is to deliver a protected area system that is one of the best in the world. A protected area system that is resilient, adaptable and valued by the community. The VBMF provides QPWS with the framework for doing just that.

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Queensland Audit Office, 2010, "Sustainable management of national parks and protected areas: A Performance Management Systems audit" www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/tableOffice/TabledPapers/2010/5310T3234.pdf

The final management plan and visitor strategy for Hinchinbrook Island are available on the Department's website at <https://www.npsr.qld.gov.au/parks/hinchinbrook/>

Images: a values based approach at Currawainya NP 2012 (left) 2017 (right) (Stephen Peck) banner: Daintree National Park (Marika Strand); left: Tony Groom in his natural habitat (supplied); below: Lamington National Park (NPAQ Library).



The Hinchinbrook Island National Park management plan from 1999 (left) compared to the new look values-based management plan

MOUNT ETNA: QUEENSLAND'S LONGEST ENVIRONMENTAL CONFLICT

Sometimes it's a rocky road to protect our natural places.

Carol Gistitin

Images: banner: Mark Marathon [CC BY-SA 3.0], via Wikimedia Commons; below: Carol Gistitin.

Mount Etna, 22 km north of Rockhampton, is a cavernous pyramid-shaped hill in a belt of limestone. It attracts bats and, since the mid-twentieth century, speleologists (those who study or explore caves) and limestone miners. Contestation between these groups led to the longest environmental conflict in Queensland – from passive protest to direct action with blockades and caves destroyed – over 40 years from the 1960s until 2009. Central Queensland Cement Limited (CQC) was the limestone miner, opposed by the University of Queensland Speleological Society (UQSS) and Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS).

Although speleologists and bats coexist as cave users, they are incompatible with limestone mining. Mount Etna and nearby Limestone Ridge have aesthetic and recreational value and support semi-evergreen vine thicket, a rare relict vegetation community. The significance of fossil deposits has also been recognised. The caves had been visited by tourist parties since 1886, and were Rockhampton's first tourist venue. They are the closest caves to Brisbane and attracted speleologists from southeast Queensland. Recreation reserves were proclaimed in 1920 but did not prevent the mining of guano, deposited by bats in their long occupation, and the development in the 1930s of a small limestone

quarry. These activities were not perceived to conflict with the reserve, and a geologist's memo in March 1939, considered that the mountain did not merit reservation for scenic purposes. During World War II a large cave was used for munitions storage and Mount Etna became a secret training base for commando troops.

Caving and limestone mining

A new generation of young students in the late 1950s and 1960s with more opportunities to travel, found the caves, discovered their richness and beauty and the diversity of the flora and birdlife of the dry rainforest. The University of Queensland Speleological Society (UQSS) was formed and encouraged the local cavers to found the Central Queensland Speleological Society (CQSS).

At the time, central Queensland was looking for new enterprises to absorb unemployed men and produce growth in the district. So limestone mining on Mount Etna began and with it the

seeds of environmental conflict between the mining company, Central Queensland Cement (CQC), and speleologists with their allies. Mount Morgan Limited began limestone mining on Limestone Ridge in 1963; Central Queensland Cement Limited (CQC) opened a quarry on Mount Etna in 1966.

Landscapes will be contested while profit and protection are in conflict.

Bats and cavers

Quarrying initially spoiled the mountain's symmetry but as it moved to the cavernous face it threatened caves valued for their beauty and as bat habitat. Bats have had 'bad press' but their protection under the *Fauna Conservation Act* became the strongest argument in efforts to

save Mount Etna. Exploration revealed the presence of rare *Macroderma gigas* bats and of a cave named Bat Cleft, the maternity cave for *Miniopterus* bats. Cavers became genuinely enthusiastic about their allies, producing magnificent photographs, supporting research and appealing to the mining company and the Government for bats' protection. The spectacular emergence flights from Bat Cleft to which CQSS began guided tours, gained wide publicity.

Letter writing and lobbying politicians brought small gains, but CQC stood its ground on its right to mine, though Mount Morgan Limited (which no longer needed lime flux) relinquished its leases on Limestone Ridge. A positive step was the proclamation in 1976 of a National Park over the former leased area. However, the recreation reserve on Mount Etna was rescinded in June 1977. Observing activity on the mountain, conservationists feared that CQC would move its quarry to the cavernous north face near Bat Cleft. This drove the contest to a more radical phase.

Direct action: blockades and blasts

The cavers' attempts to mobilise public opinion were largely ineffectual against Queensland's government-supported cement monopoly. But in the 1970s and early 1980 they learned from the tactics of campaigners who saved the Colong Caves

in the New South Wales Blue Mountains, and the Franklin River in Tasmania. Sabotage, sit-ins, shareholder action, boycotts and blockades were all considered – though the objective was to enlist public opinion, not to alienate it. Locally jobs were more important to more people than bats, so the campaign had to find support where it mattered – in Brisbane and Canberra, and Mount Etna was listed on the Register of the National Estate in 1981.

The imminent destruction of two bat habitat caves was the impetus for direct action. What followed was a campaign which deployed media, protest, interstate reinforcements and accusations of trespass from CQC. After six weeks CQC and the campaigners called a moratorium which included a halt to mining and the blockade was lifted.

When CQC dismissed a scientific report submitted by the Mount Etna Committee (formed by CQSS and its allies), the moratorium collapsed. CQC shocked the community and the media by commencing a program of blasting the caves. Accused by the media of needless destruction, CQC lost support. A change in company ownership brought a new attitude to conservation which better fitted community attitudes and the policies of the newly elected State Labor government under Premier Wayne Goss.

Landscapes will be contested while profit and protection

are in conflict. At Mount Etna a reconciliation process and rehabilitation of the quarry site began and all mining ceased on 13 March 2004. On 27 September 2008 at a celebration of the centenary of national parks in Queensland, Cement Australia formally handed the former mine site of CQC to the then Environmental Protection Agency, to add to the Mount Etna National Park. The contest at Mount Etna between profit and protection, when in 1989 conservationists were routed by the cement industry, was resolved and the mine site is now National Park.

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PARK IN FOCUS

Magnetic Island National Park

Denis McMullen
Councillor - National Parks Association of Queensland

Magnetic Island lies eight kilometres off the coast of Townsville. The island has been blessed with fringing reefs, giant granite tors and boulder-strewn vistas. Named by Lieutenant James Cook as he sailed past in 1770, it is suggested that he observed deviations in his compass while in proximity to the island. Cook attributed this deviation to deposits of iron on the Island. This became the reason for the its subsequent naming, however the phenomenon has not been confirmed by later investigations.

Magnetic Island is not, like many Barrier Reef Islands, built on coral. It is, like other islands in the Cumberland Island group such as Hinchinbrook and Whitsunday, one of a series of seamounts, in this case reaching a height of 479 metres above sea level at its peak in Mount Cook. These seamounts were formed by outpourings of molten granite from a hotspot in the mantle as the plate moved northwards many millions of years ago. Magnetic Island shares Townsville's "rain shadow" which provides an average 320 sunny days each year.

The Island can be reached by ferry from Townsville which is used by both the 2000 permanent residents of the island as well as the visitors and tourists who use the island for rest and recreation.

This ferry trip captures something of the flavour formerly described by marketing posters

on the Manly ferry in Sydney, "seven miles from Sydney, but a million miles from care". Regular local commuters support this attitude, saying, "once the ferry starts, you can feel the tensions relaxing."

The island has undergone significant development over recent years and the first impression on arrival is of a wide range of accommodation options for tourists around Picnic Bay. Some of these are top quality, high-rise apartment hotels with facilities including huge swimming pools and excellent restaurants. Longer term island resident tend to feel that the homely, village feel of the past has been lost. But the visitor will find a range of offerings to suit a range of resources. Unfortunately, there is no significant camping facility on the Island.

For visitors wanting a more natural experience, the Magnetic Island National Park is concentrated in the centre of the island and at 27km² takes

up 52% of its land mass. Well-developed walks are the key feature of the park.

Wildlife on the Island includes allied rock-wallabies, particularly found on the lower reaches of Mount Cook, and koalas. Koalas were brought to the island in the 1930's to protect them from hunting as part of a State Government plan to open up an export trade with the London fur market by providing a bounty on each koala skin. Today, koalas can be seen in the eucalyptus trees along several walks.

Just off the island itself, extensive sea grass meadows provide food and habitat for sea turtles and dugongs. The sandy beaches also provide nesting sites for the turtles. Open eucalypt woodland of bloodwoods, stringy barks, and grey ironbarks cover much of the Island whilst hoop pines are found on headlands, often growing spectacularly amongst large boulders. Given the islands location in the dry tropics it lacks rainforest areas.

The koalas are seen in the eucalyptus trees, common brush-tailed possums are regularly seen at night with the assistance of a good torch. The presence of death-adders, which are ambush predators requires some caution as they hide under leaf layers but the islands green tree snakes are both picturesque and harmless.

Bird life on the Island is prolific. Commonly seen are bush stone curlews which have adapted and forage around eating areas. Their nocturnal cry is unnerving. Over 180 birds have been recorded on the Island. Common birds include rainbow lorikeets; helmeted friar birds; laughing and blue-winged kookaburras; orange-footed scrub fowl; sunbirds and spotted drongos, southern boobook owls. On the beach you may see silver gulls, crested terns, sandpipers, and

soaring on high white-bellied sea-eagles, Brahminy kites and ospreys.

The best way to get to know "Maggie" is by using the extensive walking tracks.

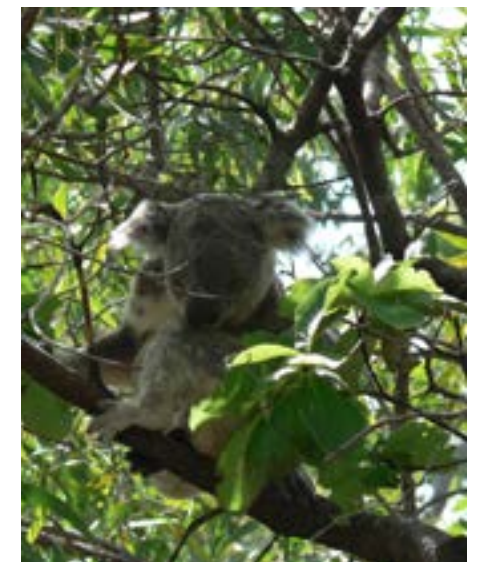
The most popular track is the Forts Walk, which is a 4km return track that takes you to the historic remains of the years when Magnetic Island played a key part in Australia's defence during World War II. The Island was fortified as a coastal battery to protect the shipping that serviced Townsville which was a major defence force site. Today this walk provides a trip through history and breathtaking views of the Palm Island group to the north and south to Bowling Green Bay National Park.

The Forts Walk track starts at Horseshoe Bay Road at the turn off to Radical Bay. The track ascends, sometimes steeply to follow a ridge behind both bays before arriving at the remains of the fort complex.

The Nelly Bay to Arcadia track is a 5km one-way moderate walk which goes through vine thickets, climbs gradually to the saddle between Nelly and Horseshoe Bays and then follows the ridge to views over Horseshoe Bay.

At this point the track splits into two with one going to Arcadia and the other to Horseshoe Bay road which leads onto other tracks.

The Island also offers a range of activities that will appeal to a wider range of people. These



include diving on the fringing reefs. This could be snorkelling, but training is available for those who wish to access the beauties of the reef through scuba diving. Courses up to the level of diving instructor are available.

Sea kayaking tours are available, led by experienced guides and catering for all levels of experience. The tour around the headlands and through the bays brings a wider range of the Island's beauty.

For those who want something gentler, walking along the foreshore is very pleasant.

Images: banner: Magnetic Island from Castle Hill (NPAQ Image Library); Left: Horseshoe Bay (Reflexio - Wikimedia Commons) Right: Fort Observation Post (Twistie.man - Wikimedia Commons), Far Right: Cath Ellerman-Bull



WILDLIFE FEATURE

The night parrot (*Pezoporus occidentalis*)

Nick Leseberg
UQ PhD candidate
Bush Heritage Australia Night Parrot researcher

Image: Nick Leseberg

The night parrot was first recorded by Europeans on Charles Sturt's 1844 expedition to central Australia and encountered occasionally throughout central Australia until the early 20th century. It then seemed to vanish for reasons unknown, although the finger was pointed, even then, at the spread of pastoralism, feral animals and changed fire regimes.

For much of the 20th century the only evidence of the bird's existence was an intermittent trickle of reports; some certainly authentic, some undoubtedly not. These reports came from an eclectic mix of explorers, graziers, jackaroos and Indigenous landholders.

Hard evidence of the night parrot's continued existence was found in 1990 beside a dusty highway near Boulia in western Queensland. Walter Boles, an Australian Museum ornithologist and probably one of few people who knew what he was looking at, spotted the desiccated carcass of a night parrot by the road side. A piece of road-kill. Though other tantalising reports followed verifying its continued existence, the night parrot remained Australia's least-known bird.

In 2013, on a cattle station in western Queensland, naturalist John Young not only saw the mythical Night Parrot, he recorded its call, photographed one, and even took a short video! After more than a century of hope both the scientific

and birding communities were abuzz.

Thanks to a period of intense research that followed, we now know that night parrots in western Queensland seem relatively sedentary and predictably vocal, occupying areas of long-unburnt spinifex, sometimes for extended periods. Year round, the parrots call to each other in the first hour after sunset, and again just before sunrise. In May 2016, a GPS tagged male was found to be travelling several kilometres from his roost to feed on grassy floodplains, stony pavements and small drainage lines, on one night clocking up at least 40 kilometres.

Further research is underway by the Threatened Species Recovery Hub of the National Environmental Science Program to track and confirm the bird's behaviour in dry periods and develop a more complete picture of its habitat. Investigations are also underway on threats facing the bird. We know that cat numbers are low in the landscape where the parrots occur, and foxes are absent. Work by the TSR Hub, supported by Bush Heritage Australia, is looking at the impact of dingoes on cats. It will also be important, now that grazing is excluded from some of the areas where the birds occur, to monitor any changes this causes in resource availability and its impact on the parrots.

Since 2013, night parrots have

been found in Diamantina and Gorge National Parks and on a couple of nearby pastoral leases. Birds have also been found in central Western Australia, and very recently, what are very likely to be night parrots have been recorded calling at a site in the southern Northern Territory.

Superficially the habitats where these birds occur are quite different and provide many unanswered questions about its population distribution.

Conservation of the night parrot will require an appreciation of how modern conservation techniques can be adapted for the species. As populations are likely to be widely spaced and isolated, it is doubtful that Australia's protected area estate alone will conserve the species. Instead, integrated conservation measures implemented jointly between state authorities and private landholders will be required.

Pleasingly, in the region where the birds have recently been found in Queensland, landholders have demonstrated a general willingness to assist with night parrot conservation, provided this can be balanced with the demands of managing their land for profit. Given that most night parrots are likely to occur on private land, the goodwill of private landholders will be an important component whatever the direction night parrot conservation takes.

THE NATIONAL PARK EXPERIENCE

Personal reflection on why our parks must be valued

Reece Pianta
National Parks Association of Queensland staff

Images: banner: our little expedition heads off; inset right: pegs marking cabins, common areas and walkway; inset left: canopy view.
PHOTOS: REECE PIANTA

Main Range, like so many Queensland national parks, is home to outstanding walks, wildlife and views. Unfortunately, but also not unlike many Queensland national parks, it is under threat from invasive species, climate change, visitor intensification and ecotourism activities.

For some time now, NPAQ staff have had briefings from the project proponent and government officers about the proposal for construction of two commercial camp sites and a new track penetrating the heart of the park itself. People who know this area well have been leading voices raising concerns about the proposal, and NPAQ has been lobbying the government to prevent commercial infrastructure in Main Range National Park. Much of this work has been an academic exercise, deploying documentary evidence and maps.

NPAQ knows all too well, however, that the only real way to get a sense of what a place is like is to go there.



In late February, NPAQ staff and Councillors took a daytrip to Main Range National Park, Goomburra section, 85 kilometers southwest of Brisbane.

The immediately striking thing about this park is its proximity to horse studs, grazing property and park adjacent ecotourism enterprises. Even on the weekday when we were there the park had recreational visitors including a caravanning couple. This park is already well serviced, and despite the water over the road at several crossings, remained easily accessible. Main Range's proximity to Brisbane makes it well trafficked but it remains well maintained.

Our first stop was the proposed Woodcutters Ecolodge site. When we arrived marker pegs were easily visible spread throughout the area of the now long abandoned logging camp. Even within our small group there was debate about the merits of this site. It was not pristine rainforest – the old loggers had cleared area for their purposes. But these marker pegs mapped out proposed permanent private structures on national park land reserved for private commercial use – further undermining the conservation role of national parks.

We moved on to the area where the proposed future Gainsdale scenic rim trail would intersect with the existing public track (around one third of the way along the Cascades Circuit within the World Heritage rainforest area). This location was less ambiguous as to its costs and merits. The pristine rainforest is to be intersected by a private walking track. Clearly public



access could not be restricted to this proposed track, but the purpose of the track is to provide a space for privately operated guided walks.

The group split at this point – half following the Ridge track, moving out of the heavily rainforest area onto drier and rockier terrain, and half completing the Cascades circuit, deeper into forest area with more than a dozen creek crossings and a spectacular waterfall.

Walks always give me time to think – it is true that on balance the proposal is from a respected player in the ecotourism space, but there are more variables than that. How do you develop criteria that measures the merits of one commercial activity in a national park against another?

NPAQ will continue active advocacy to the Queensland government and we will soon be releasing leading practices, a model for ecotourism in national parks. We welcome your feedback on this and any of the other ecotourism proposals on foot at the moment across our state.

RANGER OF THE MONTH

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

Chris Mitchell
Diamantina National Park

Chris Mitchell is Ranger-in-Charge at Diamantina National Park. After completing a Rural Science degree, he worked as a cotton consultant in Emerald, then did a stint of contract mustering around Longreach. A meeting with QPWS ranger, Tim Pulsford, who at the time was establishing an office in Longreach, Chris decided to try a different life path. He successfully applied for a position as a Wildlife Ranger in the Central West... and the rest is history.

How long have you worked in national parks?

I began working for QPWS at the start of 1989 as a Wildlife Ranger.

Which parks have you worked in?

The main park I've worked in is Diamantina. I've worked several roles since 1989—Wildlife Ranger, Park Ranger at Diamantina, District Manager, and Botanist with the Queensland Herbarium, all based in Longreach. I then moved to the Gold Coast as Operations Manager—that was a change in scenery! I was looking after the World Heritage parks of Lamington and Springbrook as well as Mount Tamborine, Nerang, and South Stradbroke Island (with the Gold City Council). Then I moved into the (more sedate) role of running the monitoring and evaluation program for parks in the Southern Region, encompassing an area from Fraser Island in the east to Currawinya in the west (yeah! back to the dry country).

During the early part of my career, part of this job involved the on-ground field work to identify potential new national parks with a team established by Paul Sattler. While



QPWS ranger Chris Mitchell (above).

PHOTOS: CHRIS MITCHELL & QLD GOVERNMENT

working in the Southern Region, we trialed programs to report on management and conservation outcomes. This resulted in my move to central office for 5 years to work in the Pest and Fire programs, while working on programs to link park planning and management evaluation.

When the Ranger-In-Charge position at Diamantina became available, after a few (short) discussions with my wife, we took up the opportunity and moved back here in June 2013.

What is your most memorable moment?

I think my most memorable period was when I was involved in the identification and establishment of a substantial area of new national parks in the early 1990s. These were exciting times. It was great to work with a visionary team and I learned a great deal about conservation prioritisation in a very short time. There were many challenges—setting aside new conservation areas in a landscape previously used for broadscale

grazing was a very new concept for whole communities.

Can you describe your favourite national parks experience?

Waking up in a swag in the middle of a remote park. The feel of the early morning and sense of isolation is fantastic. Mind you, you soon get reminded by the flies that things are going to heat up fairly quickly.

What is the best part about working in a National Park?

While much of the work in more remote parks is undertaken by only one or two people, you are part of a larger team of dedicated people, with a shared ethos of conservation. I enjoy the challenge of working in remote and isolated areas where you have to be self-reliant.

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

Most of the western parks aren't great places to bushwalk—they are more about four-wheel-drive experiences. However, visitors should get out and take short walks away from their vehicles. Just make sure you always have water with you. This way you will get the 'feel' of the country—you can't do that from inside an air-conditioned cab.

What is your top tip for campers?

Experience camping away from water and waterholes. While a number of animals congregate around the water, there is a whole ecosystem that survives on little or no water. The only way to learn about these special ecosystems is to immerse yourself in them—even if only for a night. Remember to bring water and a fly veil.

NPAQ thanks Chris 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

More details npaq.org.au/events

Eprapah Environmental Training Centre

Date: Sunday, 22 April 2018

Meet: 7.30am on the corner of Redlands Rd and Coburn Avenue, Victoria Point

Cost: \$5 per person NPAQ fee

Leader: Lesley Joyce 07 38187646 or 0423 109 788

Directions: From Cleveland/Redland Bay Road, turn east into Colburn Avenue at Victoria Point. Drive for approx. 450 metres & directly opposite the Sharks Sports Club, there is a well formed gravel road off to the left.

This area has a great variety of birds in a very easily traversed site.

Bring: binoculars, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, water, chair, morning tea (lunch optional)

Mt Mitchell and Mt Cordeaux

Date: Sunday, 22 April 2018

Meet: 8.15am Cunningham's Gap carpark, Main Range National Park.

Grade: Easy

Cost: \$5 per person NPAQ fee

Leader: Fiona Campbell,
fimegcait@bigpond.com 0414 664 089

Directions: From Brisbane, take the Cunningham highway towards Warwick. Drive through Aratula and up the range.

Bring: Hat, sunscreen, 2 litres water, rain jacket, morning tea, lunch, sturdy walking boots.

We will tackle Mt Mitchell first before crossing the highway to tackle Mt Cordeaux. A stop off at Aratula for afternoon tea is an added extra. The walk is on graded track that could be rough in places. Expect steep drop offs where care is needed.

Tullawallal Circuit, Binna Burra

Date: Saturday, 5 May 2018

Meet: Contact Geoff for details

Cost: \$5 per person NPAQ fee

Leader: Geoff Lowes 0411 502 306

Bring: binoculars, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, water.

A very lovely walk with a gentle contour that qualifies as a friendly family 5 km circuit walk. More details to follow.

Wolston Creek Bushland reserve

Date: Sunday, 20 May 2018

Meet: 7.30am at the end of Sumners Road Wolston Creek Bushland Reserve - Riverhills

Cost: \$5 per person NPAQ fee

Leader: Geraldine Buchanan 07 3349 1109

Bring: binoculars, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, water, chair, morning tea (lunch optional)

We will be following Wolston Creek leading to the Brisbane River. This is a well vegetated area with a variety of habitats.

Berrinba Wetlands

Date: Wednesday, 23 May 2018

Meet: 9:30 am at the Berrinba Wetlands Interpretive Centre

Cost: \$5 per person NPAQ fee

Leader: Len and Laurelle Lowry 0428 335 572,
onthewallaby@live.com.au

Bring: binoculars, hat, sunscreen, insect repellent, water, morning tea (lunch optional)

We are planning a circuit walk of about 4km on the concrete pathway. The level walking allows for having a chat along the way.

NPAQ events

NPAQ Member's Meeting

The next NPAQ member's meeting:

Date: Wednesday, May 16, 2018

Time: 7:15pm for 7:30pm start

Venue: NPAQ Office, 10/36 Finchley St, Milton

Historical enthusiast Neville McManimm will present a talk on NPAQ's founder, Romeo Lahey. He will base the presentation on Lahey's 1915 talk entitled "Some Reasons Why National Parks Should be Established in Qld". Neville will be able to show copies of Romeo's original slides and present some of his original words, along with modern images and interpretation.

**Not yet a member?
Join now for just \$10**

(regular price \$45)

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our national parks.**



Image Demi-Rose Walter

\$10 offer for new individual members only. Renewals will be at full price. New members will receive electronic version of publications.

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