Central West
Queensland parks
Visitor guide

National Parks of the Cooper Creek catchment
Idalia National Park
Welford National Park
Lochern National Park
Forest Den National Park
Hell Hole Gorge National Park (no vehicle access)

Parks of the Diamantina River catchment
Goneaway National Park (no vehicle access)
Bladensburg National Park
Lark Quarry Conservation Park
Combo Waterhole Conservation Park
Elizabeth Springs Conservation Park
   (walking access only within park)
Diamantina National Park
Munga-Thirri National Park

Boil the billy, throw the swag under the stars, clamber up an escarpment, gaze over waving grasslands or see old pastoralist relics.
The parks surrounding Longreach fall within two extensive river catchments—the Cooper Creek and Diamantina River catchments—the most variable large watercourses in the world. They feed the Lake Eyre Basin, one of the world’s last largely unregulated wild river systems. Humans, plants and animals depend on flood cycles that transform this dry, harsh land into a teeming mass of life. Each park has distinct values. The secret to appreciating their diversity is to learn about their similarities and differences.

Past presences

Many Aboriginal groups thrived on the secret bounty of these arid and semi-arid lands, trading along rivers and finding food in unlikely places. Each group encountered non-Indigenous people who changed their lives forever, but their heritage is alive today in stories, artefacts and traditions continued by descendants.

Explorers like Burke and Wills sought their fortunes, as did miners and pastoralists from Europe and Asia. Many died, some barely survived, but others thrived.

Now pastoral properties—some more than 10 000km²—mines, small towns, parks and reserves dot outback Queensland’s landscape.

Central West Queensland has been alternately shaped by, then starved of, water for eons.

Parks to conserve our past and future

Covering 2.1 million hectares, 13 national and conservation parks encircle Longreach to help protect the natural and cultural heritage of semi-arid Central West Queensland.

Craggy escarpments and deep gullies tell of a land that has been alternately shaped by, then starved of, water for eons.

Cretaceous sea floors and lakebeds laid down 65–140 million years ago form the base of the landscape, preserving fossils from shellfish to dinosaurs.

Drainage lines of the Mitchell grass downs are visible for kilometres. These are identified by the coolibahs and river red gums—strikingly tall trees in a land dominated by stunted vegetation.

Explore arid environments

Bioregions are unique environments, defined by their distinct geology and climate. Visitors to Central West Queensland parks can explore four different bioregions.

Channel country

Mighty inland rivers disperse into braided channels, creating waterholes and wetlands. With its slow-flowing waters and floodplains tens of kilometres wide, channel country may be the world’s finest natural watering system.

It supports more than 50 ecosystems, including coolibah woodlands, sand plains and vast dunefields—all adapted to a climate of infrequent rain that falls in short but massive deluges and a parching evaporation rate.

Mitchell grass downs

Natural grasslands, named for the dominant native Mitchell grass, form the basis of the region’s grazing industry. Their roots are anchored in dark clay soils formed from ancient sediments.

When wet, the soils absorb water and expand. When dry, they shrink and crack deeply, making it difficult for trees to establish roots. Animals shelter within the cracks, including endangered Julia Creek dunnarts.

Mulga lands

Sand plains, deep red loam soils and a drier climate allow mulga trees to dominate, with mosaic patches of grasslands and eucalypt–acacia woodlands.

Each mulga tree canopy channels rain to its deep tap root, like an umbrella blown inside out. Mulga trees grow slowly in dry country and can be hundreds of years old. Their compact, strong timber is used widely for tools by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Desert uplands

This botanically diverse bioregion features semi-arid sand plains formed from eroded sandstone ranges of the ancient Great Divide.

Dominated by acacia–eucalypt woodland with spinifex hummock grassland, the uplands are home to specialised fauna.

Although Forest Den National Park falls within this bioregion, it does not have the characteristic features of desert uplands.
Make the most of your trip

Discern the differences
Although some parks overlap bioregions and ecosystems, each offers a different experience. Visit each park to discover its unique attributes.

- Bladensburg’s wide-open spaces and bare rocky scarps are a stark contrast to the tree-covered scarps of Idalia.
- The relics of a single-person shearing complex at Lochern contrast Bladensburg’s company-owned operation.
- Many parks have Mitchell grasslands. Walk through them at Lochern, Forest Den and Combo Waterhole or look over them from a higher vantage point at Bladensburg.
- Channel country dominates at Diamantina and includes extensive wetlands of national significance.

- Welford’s spinifex-clad red sand dunes hint of the Simpson Desert, while its open mulga on red soil contrasts the dense mulga of Idalia’s rocky scarps.
- Nestled in Lark Quarry’s spinifex-clad rocky scarps, see the footprints of the world’s only known dinosaur stampede.

Choose a travel route
To see all parks open to visitors, allow at least three weeks. Not all parks allow camping. Check before leaving home.

Short trips (about one week)
- Longreach—Lochern—Welford—Idalia—Longreach
- Winton—Bladensburg—Lark Quarry—return via Winton—Combo Waterhole
- Forest Den
- Diamantina

Longer trips (about two weeks)
- Bladensburg—Combo Waterhole—Lark Quarry—Diamantina

The Munga-Thirri National Park adds at least one week to any itinerary.

What would you like to do?
Camping: Idalia, Welford, Lochern, Forest Den, Bladensburg, Diamantina and Munga-Thirri National Parks.


Macropod watching: Idalia, Welford, Lochern and Diamantina.

Walking on marked tracks: Idalia, Welford, Bladensburg, Lark Quarry and Combo Waterhole.

Boating/canoeing/kayaking: Welford, Lochern and Diamantina.

Mountain biking: Idalia, Welford and Lochern.

Experience pastoral heritage: Idalia, Welford, Lochern, Bladensburg, Combo Waterhole and Diamantina.

Experience Indigenous heritage: Diamantina.

Fossils: Bladensburg and Lark Quarry.

Self-guided scenic drives: Idalia, Welford, Lochern, Bladensburg and Diamantina.
Park access

Most Central West Queensland parks are open all year round; however, you are advised to visit from April to September only. Summer daytime temperatures can climb to over 40 °C, and high rainfall often causes flooding. Mungo-Thirrri National Park is closed from December to mid-March.

Rain can fall at any time of year. Many outback roads are unsealed and impassable after even a small amount of rain. Remember flooding can occur suddenly, or up to two weeks after rain elsewhere in the catchment. Always carry at least a week’s worth of extra supplies in case of stranding.

Access to some parks, and some areas within parks, is suitable only for four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles. No park has all-weather access roads.

There is no vehicle access to, or within, Goneaway and Hell Hole Gorge national parks.

Wheelchair access

Limited wheelchair-accessible facilities are available in Lark Quarry Conservation Park, Idalia National Park, and Lochern National Park.

Park management

Each park in Central West Queensland has unique attributes. They are managed to conserve their natural condition and protect their cultural resources and values. The Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS) of the Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing (NPRSR) is responsible for most parks in the area; however, Winton Shire Council jointly manage Lark Quarry Conservation Park.

Camping permits

Not all parks allow camping so check before leaving home. To camp in any of the camping areas in these parks you must first obtain a camping permit and fees apply. A camping tag with your booking number must be displayed at your camp site.

Check the website www.nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/parks-central-west for further information and current camping arrangements before visiting any of these parks.

Bookings for camping permits can be made at www.qld.gov.au/camping or by phoning 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

Other permits

Lark Quarry dinosaur trackways

Access to Lake Quarry’s dinosaur trackways is by guided tour only. Tours run at various times daily except for Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and fees apply. To arrange tours, contact Winton’s Waltzing Matilda Centre (see details page 20). Walking tracks on park have free access.

Commercial and group activity permits

Commercial photography permits are required if you intend to sell any photographs taken of Queensland’s parks and forests. Group activity permits may be required for organised group activities that may interfere with general public use. For more information about commercial and group activity permits, check www.nprsr.qld.gov.au or phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

Desert Parks Pass

If you wish to continue into the South Australian section of the Simpson Desert, you’ll need to purchase a Desert Parks Pass, available in Birdsville or contact the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service at www.environment.sa.gov.au.

Before you leave

Make a list, and check it twice

- Pack adequate water, food and emergency supplies. Carry 7 L of water per person per day (for drinking, cooking and limited washing), plus an extra emergency supply.
- Bring a portable stove. No fires are permitted in these parks.
- Pack a complete first-aid kit. Include sun and insect protection.
- Carry UHF, satellite phone and/or an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB). Carry a list of local UHF radio channels and emergency contacts (see details page 20). Mobile phone coverage is poor or not available in most areas.
- Take extra fuel and vehicle repairs. Frequent low gear and 4WD travel on park drives will use fuel more quickly. Use maps to plan refuelling points and calculate extra fuel to carry. Bring vehicle repair tools and spares; include two spare tyres, oil and engine coolant.
- Be familiar with your equipment and experienced with inland Australian conditions. For more remote parks ensure one person has sound mechanical knowledge of your vehicle.
- Leave an itinerary with a friend or relative. Include travel routes and/or check-in points.
- Pack for hot and cold conditions. Outback Queensland can be very hot during the day, and very cold (to below freezing point) overnight.
- Bring sturdy rubbish bags and sealable, animal-proof containers. No bins are provided.

Warning! These parks are remote and do not have a consistent ranger presence. You must be self-sufficient, responsible for your own safety, and prepared for emergencies like breakdowns or standing after rain. The nearest fuel and supplies can often be hundreds of kilometres away.
Check current conditions
- Visit www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks and go to ‘Park alerts’ for the latest information on access, closures and conditions. Or phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).
- Weather forecasts and daily temperature averages are available from the Bureau of Meteorology at www.bom.gov.au.
- Check current road conditions at www.131940.qld.gov.au, by phone on 131940 or at local council offices (see details page 20).
- Local information centres also provide information.

Take care of yourself
- Avoid travelling in Central West Queensland during the hot summer months.
- Keep to designated roads and tracks and drive with caution at all times. Animals can appear on roads at any time of day and road conditions can change quickly.
- Stay with your vehicle if it breaks down. A vehicle is much easier to find than a person.
- Always carry drinking water, whether driving or walking. Boil, filter or treat water from streams, rivers or waterholes before drinking.
- Always carry communication equipment, such as a satellite telephone or UHF radio.
- Never jump or dive into a waterhole. It may be shallow or hide submerged objects.
- Watch your step. Escarpment edges can be unstable due to natural weathering, so stay away and take care where you walk.
- Wear protective clothing. Put on a hat, sunscreen, and sturdy footwear, not thongs.
- Be aware of your surroundings at all times and be on the lookout for animals and insects that could scratch, sting or bite.

Take care of the parks
Everything in national and conservation parks is protected, including plants, animals and heritage sites and artifacts. Please appreciate, respect and care for the outstanding natural and cultural values of these parks by leaving things as you find them. Remember that Traditional Owner sites and artefacts may look just like a natural place or rock.

- Leave pets at home. Domestic animals are not allowed in national and conservation parks.
- Keep food away from wildlife. Accidental or intentional feeding upsets the balance of nature and can make animals sick and/or aggressive.
- Take your rubbish with you. No bins are provided. Pack food away immediately after meals and secure rubbish in sealed containers to avoid attracting insects and larger animals. Do not bury rubbish—dingoes or other animals will dig it up.
- Use toilets (where provided). Do not throw rubbish down them. Most of these parks have no toilets—bury toilet waste (and paper) 15 cm deep and at least 100 m from water.
- Never contaminate water. Take water at least 50 m away to wash with detergents, soap or shampoo.
- Dismantle any firearms or other weapons. Pack them away as they cannot be used in protected areas.
- Avoid transporting weeds. Clean soil and plant seeds from your shoes and gear before entering each park.

Practice low-impact driving
- Keep to designated tracks. Driving off-track damages vegetation, causes erosion and creates confusing new tracks. Arid landscapes are fragile. Plants grow extremely slowly and tyre tracks remain for decades.
- Be considerate. Much of the land is privately owned. Only cross private land on a designated track or with the landowner’s permission. Leave all gates as you find them.
- Do not drive on rain-affected roads. Even if you make it through, tyre marks damage the road surface and make it dangerous for other road users.
- Use washdown bays to remove seeds from vehicles. These are located at most towns in the district. Wheels pick up weeds during travel, and disperse them into parks.
- Watch for animals when driving. Parks are wildlife refuges.

Practice low-impact camping
- Camp only in designated camping areas.
- Set up camp away from animal nests and/or burrows to avoid disturbing them.
- Do not tie ropes to trees or drape things over vegetation. Plants recover slowly.
- Use a portable stove. Fires are prohibited and collecting firewood in parks is illegal, as wood and debris provide homes for wildlife and nutrients for the soil.
- Keep noise levels reasonable. Generators are prohibited, except for medical reasons (with NPRSR permission).

Practice responsible fishing
- Do not use frogs or other live bait. Invasive species may escape and establish a pest population.
- Comply with size and bag limits. Only keep what you can eat on site. Contact Fisheries Queensland, Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) at www.daff.qld.gov.au ahead of time for more information about fishing regulations, including size and bag limits.

Left: Practice low-impact camping and enjoy the outback serenity at a number of Central West Queensland parks. Make sure you get a camping permit before you go.
This 144 000 ha park protects extensive mulga woodlands, the headwaters of the Bulloo River and seven macropod species, including a translocated population of bridled nailtail wallabies.

Visit innovative stake stockyards built from the 1920s to 1950s to hold up to 300 cattle during muster. Wander among the rusty iron and splintered bush timber relics, imagining the stories behind them.

**Access**

Idalia National Park is 113 km south-west of Blackall in the Gowan Ranges. Access to Idalia is suitable for 4WD only. Take Isisford Road from Blackall for 44 km then turn left onto Yaraka Road. After 25 km turn left and follow the signposted road to Idalia National Park for about 44 km to the park boundary. The nearest fuel and supplies are at Blackall (113 km) and Isisford (approx. 150 km).

There is a wheelchair-accessible toilet at Monks Tank camping area.

**Camping**

**Monks Tank camping area**

Camp in mulga woodlands at Monks Tank camping area and wake early to enjoy birdwatching at dawn. This open area, located approximately 33 km from the park entrance, is suitable for tents and camper trailers and has a pit toilet. It can be reached in dry conditions by conventional vehicles, 4WDs and camper trailers. It is not suitable for large caravans.

**Things to do**

**Walking**

Walk through the rugged, rocky gorges and tablelands at different times of the day to discover Idalia at its best. It is a 37 km drive from the park entrance to Emmet Pocket Lookout. On the way, there are several side branches with short drives and walks. You could easily spend a couple of days exploring Idalia’s most accessible spots.

1. **Old Idalia (allow 30 mins to explore) Grade: easy**

As a musterer living here in a simple hut, what would you have seen…heard…smelt? Look for the remains of a wagon and see the old ship’s tank where a natural spring once supplied water to the cattle. Please leave everything at this historic site as you find it.

2. **Wave rock walk—1.2 km return (allow 1–2 hrs) Grade: easy**

Departing from Old Idalia, walk past the old ship’s tank to reach the cliff overhang shaped like a wave. Wind, sun and time are nature’s carving tool and sunsets are the paintbrush. Panoramic views from the top of the cliff give an idea of the size of the park and its diverse vegetation.
Bullock Gorge walk—2.7 km return (allow 1–2 hrs) Grade: easy
Walk through bendee shrubland along the Gowan Range’s flat ridge top. Painted rocks show the way. Take care, there are steep gorges on either side. Look for small diggings of echidnas on the track. Watch the sun rise or set over spectacular gorges and look for yellow-footed rock-wallabies. Remember to take a torch for sunset walks.

Emmet Pocket walk—4.4 km return (allow 2–3 hrs) Grade: difficult
This walk starts at the Emmet Pocket Lookout which has panoramic views over the park’s northern end. From the lookout, this track heads deep into the gorge where the plains lie before you like a map. Tree lines mark waterways that stretch from rocks to river channels. This track has steep grades up and down the gorge side.

Driving and cycling
Discover Idalia’s history, wildlife and colour at its best. Most driving tracks are suitable for keen mountain bikers who have experience in arid and remote terrain. Watch out for vehicles.

Several short drives and walks branch off the main road and there are many features along the way. Distances are from Monk’s Tank camping area.

Old Idalia drive—approximately 33 km return.
Murphy’s Rockhole drive—approximately 20 km return.
Bullock Gorge—approximately 29 km return.
Emmet Pocket Lookout—approximately 24 km return.

The leaves of mulga trees act like mirrors to reflect the sun’s intense heat.

Wildlife watching at rockholes
Where there’s water there’s wildlife—at dawn or dusk sit quietly at Junction Hole or Murphy’s Rockhole—to watch for birds, kangaroos and yellow-footed rock-wallabies. Look for koalas in eucalypt trees near water—you won’t find them much further inland than Idalia.

Visit innovative stake stockyards
(about 7 km south of Monk’s Tank)
Built between the 1920s to 1950s, Harvey’s yards (as they’re locally known) are constructed of saplings and twisted wire and held up to 300 cattle during muster. The supple branches were easy to cart and provided both strength and give in a yard that was not very threatening to cattle.

Dusty mulga
Driving north and downhill, look across the dense mulga woodland tree tops. The leaves of lancewood and mulga act like mirrors to reflect the sun’s intense heat. A burn in the 1950s promoted the dense acacia growth in Idalia’s woodland.

Wildlife viewing
Idalia is home to seven species of macropods—wallaroos, red and grey kangaroos, swamp wallabies, black-striped wallabies, yellow-footed rock-wallabies and endangered bridled nailtail wallabies. See descriptions on page 18.

Yellow-footed rock-wallabies
Petrogale xanthopus celeris are well camouflaged. They inhabit high rocky escarpments and leave only to drink and graze at the base of the cliffs. The yellow-footed rock-wallaby is vulnerable to extinction. Their main threats include predation by foxes and dingoes, as well as competition from introduced herbivores such as feral goats and sheep. Sit quietly at Emmett Pocket lookout and Bullock Gorge to observe these fascinating wallabies. Please do not disturb them by climbing down among the rocks.
Majestic river red gums line the Barcoo River, the southern boundary of the 124,000 ha park. Varied habitats create vital refuges for wildlife, including rare yellow-footed rock-wallabies and mulga parrots.

**Access**

**Southern access—from Blackall, Quilpie or Windorah**

From Blackall, travel south-west on the Yaraka–Retreat Road for 255 km to Jundah–Quilpie Road, turn right and travel 3 km to the park’s entrance.

From Quilpie, travel north-west for 195 km along the Diamantina Developmental Road towards Windorah. Turn right onto Jundah–Quilpie Road and travel 60 km to the park entrance.

From Windorah, head south-east towards Quilpie for 50 km, then turn left onto Jundah–Quilpie Road and head north-east for 60 km to the park’s entrance.

Having reached the park’s southern boundary, travel 500 m north and turn right for Trafalgar Waterhole and the Mulga Drive or travel a further 500 m north and turn left to access Little Boomerang Waterhole, the River Drive and the Desert Drive.

White-barked ghost gums *Corymbia papuana* contrast distinctly against the vivid red sand dunes.

**Northern access—from Longreach via Jundah**

From Longreach, travel south 210 km to Jundah. From Jundah, head south-east for 30 km on Jundah–Quilpie Road to the park’s northern boundary. Travel a further 20 km south to the right turn to Little Boomerang Waterhole, the River Drive and the Desert Drive or continue south for a further 50 m and turn left to reach Trafalgar Waterhole and the Mulga Drive.

The nearest fuel and supplies are at Jundah (55 km) and Windorah (110 km).

**Camping**

**Little Boomerang Waterhole camping area**

Relax and enjoy bush camping in a quiet setting on the banks of the Barcoo River. Little Boomerang Waterhole camping area, an open area under the shade of river red gums and tea-trees, is suitable for tents and camper trailers and has a pit toilet. To get to the camping area, turn west off Jundah–Quilpie Road and follow the signs for approximately 10 km. It can only be reached by conventional vehicles in dry weather. Four-wheel-drive vehicles are recommended.
Desert Drive—22 km one way (allow at least 3 hrs)
Travel north from Little Boomerang Waterhole and take the western turn, which marks the start of this drive.

1 Desert waterhole
Sand plains and dunes make thirsty country, but where there’s water there’s life. Look among the coolabah trees for white-plumed honeyeaters. You may also notice a number of termite mounds.

2 Colourful dunes
Capture the dune colours on camera. Welford’s isolated dunes are at the eastern reaches of the Lake Eyre sand dune system. You may walk (but never drive) up the dune. Take care not to disturb the fragile plants.

3 Oil Bore
Clay-lubricated drills bored 2500 m deep for oil in 1986. Oil Bore now brings water from 1800 m below ground.

4 Southern Cross Bore
A windmill once pumped precious water into the stock troughs. At 45 m this sub-artesian bore is not deep.

River Drive—12.3 km one way (allow at least 1.5 hrs) 4WD access only
From Little Boomerang Waterhole, travel north and take the right turn-off towards the banks of the Barcoo River. Impressive river red gums offer shade and tranquility. Although the Barcoo is a series of billabongs in dry times, flood debris caught in high branches tells of dynamic wet times when the river floods the vast plains and cuts all roads. Debris is washed down with such force that some wildlife and livestock are swept to their death—life giving waters can also take their toll.

The drive also takes in a string of claypans where the slick surface of the barely permeable clay inhibits growth of most plant roots.

Mulga Drive—54.5 km return (allow at least 4 hrs) 4WD access only
Continue east from the old homestead to follow the flat expanse of the Barcoo River flood plains. The rare pise (rammed earth) homestead, built on this former grazing property in 1882, is now staff quarters. As this is private accommodation, access is prohibited. The drive takes in the mulga country, dissected by stony escarpments and gullies. Be sure to enjoy the walk to Sawyers lookout.

Things to do

Trafalgar Waterhole day-use area
Enjoy a picnic on the banks of the Barcoo River under the shade of coolabah trees. Turn east off the Jundah–Quilpie road and travel approximately 18 km. Follow the signs. The day-use area can only be reached by 4WD.

Walking
Sawyers lookout—1.2 km return (allow 30 mins) Grade: moderate
Park near the sign marking the turn-off to Sawyers Lookout on Mulga Drive. Walk from the drive to take in panoramic views of exposed rocky outcrops, slopes and spidery networks of channel country. Bright green foliage along the creek lines stands out like veins carrying lifeblood—water. Take a closer look at animal footprints, soil cracks, gibber rocks and other small features of the landscape, and keep an eye out for birds and wildlife such as yellow-footed rock-wallabies at dusk.

Driving and mountain biking
Welford offers three self-guided scenic drives on which you can explore dunes, rocky outcrops, scrub, plains, channels and billabongs. For the best chance to see Welford’s wildlife, drive slowly and carefully and go in either early morning or late afternoon.

The park’s scenic drives are also suitable for mountain biking. Be careful of other vehicles.

Boating and fishing
Little Boomerang Waterhole has a large expanse of permanent water—a popular location for boating, canoeing and kayaking. Care is needed when launching boats or canoes from the river bank due to steep and slippery conditions.

Fishing in the Barcoo River is permitted but size and bag limits apply.

Viewing wildlife
Go wildlife watching. See pelicans, brolgas, black swans and whistling kites around waterholes. Look for brush-tailed possums at night. See emus on grassy plains and pink cockatoos, red-winged parrots and mulga parrots in the mulga woodlands.

The Barcoo River has so much to offer—camping, fishing, boating, canoeing, kayaking and wildlife watching.

Cattle can tell the difference. Can you?
Cattle find mulga Acacia aneura tasty but ignore gidgee Acacia cambagei trees. Welford is now destocked and the national park protects these mulga woodlands.

Take in the contrasting colours of Welford National Park.
Lochern National Park

Lochern protects 24,300 ha of important habitat, including 20 km of Thomson River frontage. The park’s many lagoons and waterholes provide refuge for birds and other wildlife.

Access

Lochern National Park is about 150 km south-west of Longreach and 45 km north of Stonehenge. Turn off the Longreach–Jundah Road at the Lochern signpost 100 km south of Longreach. Follow this unsealed road for about 40 km to the park boundary at Thomson River.

If travelling from Winton via Lark Quarry, allow 4–5 hrs for the 330 km trip. Expect poor, rough road conditions and watch for bulldust—very fine red dust—and road trains. The nearest fuel and supplies are at Longreach or Stonehenge.

The information centre at Lochern National Park is wheelchair accessible.

Camping

Broadwater Waterhole camping area

Camp near a permanent waterhole in the shade of coolibah trees and wake to the dawn bird chorus. The open area of Broadwater Waterhole camping area is suitable for tents and camper trailers but no facilities are provided. The camping area turn-off is approximately 5 km from the park’s eastern boundary. Turn right and travel another 1 km to the camping information sign. It can be reached by conventional vehicle and 4WD.

Boating and fishing

Canoeing and kayaking in Broadwater Waterhole are popular. Bring your own canoes. Fishing in the waterholes is also permitted but size and bag limits apply.

Walking and mountain biking

The park has no walking tracks but visitors can wander around the river and waterholes. As Lochern is relatively quiet and the terrain is gentle the habitat drive is also suitable for walking as well as mountain biking. Be careful of other vehicles.

Driving

For the best chance to see Lochern’s wildlife, drive slowly and carefully and go in either the early morning or evening.

Lochern habitat drive—approx. 40 km return (allow 2–4 hrs)

This scenic drive is only accessible to four-wheel-drive vehicles. Learn how Lochern’s wildlife and people adapted to the cycles of wet and dry.

Wander through woodlands

1. Gidgee and mulga woodlands dominate at Lochern.

See gidgee woodlands here with a sparse shrub layer of false sandalwood and harlequin fuschia bush. The shrub layer of mulga woodlands is dominated by silver turkey bush.

2. Bootlace trees

Their furrowed corky bark and spiny leaves are distinctive.

3. Gidgee swamps

These swamps teem with tadpoles and invertebrates after good rain.

4. Gaze across open plains

where all four Mitchell grass species grow in the cracking clay soils of Lochern’s Mitchell grass plains. In winter, watch for male emus leading a string of newborn chicks across the plains.

Legend

- National park
- Waterhole
- Waterway
- Unsealed road
- Lochern habitat drive
- Camping
- Information
- Point of interest (refer to text)

The Australian bustard Ardeotis australis, or plains turkey as it’s otherwise known, can often be spotted in open country.

Things to do

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Freshwater fish

Barra

Arbacia pagrus

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Canoeing and kayaking in Broadwater Waterhole are popular. Bring your own canoes. Fishing in the waterholes is also permitted but size and bag limits apply.

Walking and mountain biking

The park has no walking tracks but visitors can wander around the river and waterholes. As Lochern is relatively quiet and the terrain is gentle the habitat drive is also suitable for walking as well as mountain biking. Be careful of other vehicles.

Boating and fishing

Canoeing and kayaking in Broadwater Waterhole are popular. Bring your own canoes. Fishing in the waterholes is also permitted but size and bag limits apply.

Walking and mountain biking

The park has no walking tracks but visitors can wander around the river and waterholes. As Lochern is relatively quiet and the terrain is gentle the habitat drive is also suitable for walking as well as mountain biking. Be careful of other vehicles.
This 5890 ha park conserves a wide diversity of plants, some unique to this reserve within the region. Majestic river red gum and coolibah trees line waterholes, mesmerising visitors and providing a refuge in dry times.

Although used as grazing land for more than 100 years, little remains of this era apart from a few pastoral relics-fences, gateways and a derelict round timber bridge over Torrens Creek.

Forest Den National Park is 100 km north of Aramac. Take the Corinda turn-off on Torrens Creek Road and travel east. Turn left after 5 km and head north for a further 4.5 km to Four Mile Waterhole camping area. The nearest fuel and supplies are at Aramac.

Camping

Four Mile Waterhole camping area
Camp near the banks of Torrens Creek at Four Mile Waterhole camping area. This open area in the shade of coolibah and river red gums trees is suitable for tents and camper trailers. No facilities are provided. The camping area can only be reached in dry weather, and only by 4WD vehicle, it’s not suitable for large caravans.

Things to do

Walking
The park has no walking tracks but you can wander around the creeks and waterholes. As Forest Den is relatively quiet and the terrain is gentle, the road is also suitable for walking.

Driving
Follow the winding channels of Torrens and Paradise creeks, occasionally looking out across Mitchell grass plains. For the best chance to see Forest Den’s wildlife, drive slowly and go in either the early morning or evening.

Viewing wildlife
River red gums and coolibahs line the river channels and floodplains, while river tea-trees flourish beside deeper waterholes. Other woodland species, such as Reid river box, ironwood, beefwood and bauhinia, occur on the sandy ‘patchy plains’ in the park’s western sections. These trees create habitat for a range of fascinating wildlife. The park was established to conserve black gidgee at its western limit.

Look for whistling kites, brown falcons, white ibis, egrets, blue-winged kookaburras and rufous-throated honeyeaters. Spot squatter pigeons hiding in the grass. At night, watch for sugar gliders and brushtail possums in the trees or Beccari’s freetail bats skimming over water.

Follow the floodwaters
Larger watercourses are lined with coolibahs, native bauhinia and river tea tress with a shrub layer of river cooba, creek wilga and lignum. Queensland blue bush grows on flood plains.
The Koa people consider Bladensburg to be part of their traditional country, and the park is also important to the Maiawali and Karuwal people. Skull Hole is believed to be the site of a massacre of Aboriginal people in the late 1800s.

Pastoralists established a large station at Bladensburg—the homestead has been restored and is used as an information centre and ranger office. There are other sites within this 84 900 ha park that offer reminders of the park's early pastoral history.

Access

Drive south from Winton towards Jundah. After about 8 km turn left along the Route of the River Gum. From the turn-off it is 5 km to a junction. Turn left to Bladensburg homestead (5 km) or right along the Route of the River Gum to Bough Shed Hole camping area (12 km).

Conventional vehicles can access Bladensburg only during dry weather and a high clearance 4WD vehicle is recommended at all times.

Camping

Bough Shed Hole camping area

Camp beside Surprise Creek and see wallaroos and red kangaroos at the permanent Bough Shed waterhole. The camping area is an open area suitable for tents and camper trailers and has a pit toilet. It is located 12 km south of the park boundary, along the Route of the River Gum tourist drive. A high clearance 4WD is recommended year round but the camping area may be reached in dry weather by conventional vehicles with high clearance.

Things to do

Walking

Bladensburg homestead walk (allow 30–45 mins) Grade: easy

Explore the restored homestead and its original complex, consisting of staff quarters, meat house and store. Obtain a Bladensburg homestead walk guide brochure onsite and discover outback station life from a time when 11 miles (around 18 km) to Winton was a long way.
Who was Scrammy Jack?

Boundary riders sometimes became hermits known as ‘hatters’—in reference to their hat covering their entire family—meaning they lived alone. One such ‘hatter’ was Scrammy Jack, so named after his hand was crushed by a wagon wheel. Scrammy is an old English term meaning ‘left-handed’. He worked for neighbouring Vindex Station, probably around 1900. When he was discovered dead, a simple grave would have been constructed with a typical post and wire fence. Old posts, scraps of wire and rusty nails are all that is left of his simple hut and horse yards. The grave’s fence has been reconstructed.

Driving

Route of the River Gum—72 km return to Winton (allow half a day)

Starting at the Waltzing Matilda Centre in Winton, the Route of the River Gum passes 15 places of interest in Winton Shire and through Bladensburg National Park. Pick up a Winton Shire drive guide brochure from the Waltzing Matilda Centre before heading off.

Scrammy Drive—40 km return (allow 2–4 hrs)

Find out who Scrammy was and share his view over Bladensburg National Park. Starting at Bladensburg Homestead, Scrammy Drive leads over black soil plains, through grassland and channels, then climbs up the jump-up to Scrammy Gorge and the track leading to Scrammy Lookout. This drive can only be accessed by high clearance vehicles, and a 4WD vehicle is recommended.

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Panicked dinosaurs left more than 4000 muddy footprints—dinosaur trackways—on the shores of a lake. The dinosaur trackways are protected inside a solar-powered shelter built using ecologically sustainable methods.

**Access**

The park is 110 km south west of Winton. It is possible to reach the park in a conventional vehicle, however a 4WD vehicle is recommended. Stop in Winton for directions, fuel and the latest road conditions. Allow two hours to travel the unsealed road to the 400 ha park. At Lark Quarry there are no reliable UHF channels for contacting others.

Entry to the park, its walking tracks and the orientation centre is free, but access to Lark Quarry’s dinosaur trackways is by guided tour only and a fee applies. The trackways building is wheelchair accessible. To arrange tours, contact Winton’s Waltzing Matilda Centre (see details page 20).

**Camping is not permitted at Lark Quarry Conservation Park.**

**Things to do**

**Watching wildlife**

Keen observers may see a number of animals in the park during the day. Commonly seen birds include spinifex pigeons, painted firetails, crimson chats, singing honeyeaters and little woodswallows. It’s possible to see ring-tailed dragons and death adders sunning themselves. Wallaroos are also quite common.

**Walking**

**Spinifex Circuit—500 m (allow 30 mins) Grade: easy–moderate**

The circuit starts at the dinosaur trackways shelter and returns to the car park. A lookout over the surrounding countryside offers excellent views of Mitchell grass downs to the east and channel country in the west. The track is steep in places and care must be taken at the lookout’s edges.

**Dinosaur trackways**

Hundreds of dinosaur footprints—evidence of a dinosaur stampede that occurred 100 million years ago—are preserved in rock formed from the mud that once bordered a prehistoric lake. Lake Quarry Conservation Park was established to protect this unusual feature and its surrounding landscape.

Discovered in the early 1960s by an observant manager of a nearby grazing property, the first dinosaur footprints were excavated in 1971. Queensland Museum officers and volunteers carried out further diggings during 1976–77. These revealed large trackways containing graphic evidence of dinosaurs.

The site was excavated and recorded, then covered with hay and plastic to minimise the effects of the weather on the tracks. An open shelter was soon built, providing shade and rain protection. Today the trackways are further protected within its mud brick building.

Visitors on guided tours only can experience this incredible historic site. To arrange tours, contact Winton’s Waltzing Matilda Centre (see details page 20).
Did the jolly swagman camp by Combo Waterhole? This park encompasses a series of waterholes, the most famous of which is rumoured to have inspired ‘Banjo’ Paterson to write *Waltzing Matilda*.

**Access**

Combo Waterhole Conservation Park is 132 km north-west of Winton. Turn south off the Lansborough Highway 13 km south of Kynuna and follow the short drive to the park. Vehicles are not permitted beyond the car park. A 4WD vehicle is recommended.

Camping is prohibited at Combo Waterhole Conservation Park. Nearby Kynuna offers camping facilities.

**Things to do**

**Walking**

Combo Waterhole—2.9 km return (allow 1.5 hrs) Grade: easy

Discover the story of *Waltzing Matilda* while walking along the self-guided track to Combo Waterhole. The track begins at the car park and leads through Mitchell grass downs and across stone-pitched overshots and the Diamantina River’s braided channels to this famous waterhole. Please be aware this track floods after rain. Do not attempt to cross the flooded creek.

**Picnic and day-use area**

Picnic tables and a nearby toilet are adjacent to the car park. Alternatively take a blanket and picnic in the shade of a coolibah tree once you reach the historic waterhole at the end of the short walk.

**Viewing wildlife**

Combo Waterhole is a wildlife refuge, particularly in dry times and birdwatching is particularly good. You may see Australian pratincoles on your drive in. These attractive birds have long legs suited to open country where they feed and nest and some migrate between Australia and Indonesia or New Guinea. Listen for the tiny weebill’s call—surprisingly far-carrying for such a small bird. Rainbow bee-eaters, sacred kingfishers and spotted harriers have all been seen in this park. Many more bird species can be seen and heard along the waterway.
Diamantina’s 507 000 ha is home to many rare and threatened species, including bilbies, kowaris and two ground dwelling birds—the plains wanderer and the elusive night parrot. Lake Constance and Hunters Gorge are nationally important wetlands and support breeding populations of many resident and migratory birds.

The watercourses, plains and ranges once supported the Maiawali and Karuwali people, who followed the seasons to where food and freshwater were plentiful. They moved through every part of this landscape and maintain close physical and spiritual connections to country today.

Early explorers revealed the potential for a thriving cattle industry on the extensive grass plains and naturally deep waterholes and Diamantina Lakes Station was established in 1875.

Access

Diamantina National Park can be reached by heading south from Winton or Bouli, north from Windorah or east from Bedourie. A 4WD vehicle with high clearance is necessary as many outback roads are unsealed and wheel ruts can be deep. Take extra fuel. Nearest fuel and supplies are at Boulia (183 km), Winton (306 km) or Windorah (350 km).

Below: Drive the Warracoota Circuit to learn more about Diamantina’s stunning desert landscape.

Inset: The vulnerable kowari Dasyuroides byrnei is also known as the brush-tailed marsupial rat due to the distinctive brush of black hairs on the end of its tail.

Plan well ahead

Diamantina is remote and even small amounts of rain make roads impassable. Visitors must plan well ahead; avoid hot summer travel, carry additional fuel, emergency food supplies if rained in, vehicles spares and repair equipment and communication equipment. Be sure to read all planning and safety information in this guide and the Diamantina National Park Guide (see Further information).

Things to do

Camp under the stars at Hunters Gorge or Gum Hole camping areas.

Learn about the park’s heritage in displays in the visitor information room in the old storeroom at the homestead.

Drive the scenic Warracoota Circuit to explore pastoral relics and learn about the desert landscape—detailed in the park guide.

Learn of the lives of Traditional Owners before non-Indigenous people came and consider how things have changed.

Visit ancient and recent heritage sites—the old station homestead, the Mayne Hotel and other ruins near the Warracoota Circuit drive.

Canoe, birdwatch or visit Janet’s Leap for a bird’s-eye view of the mighty Diamantina Gates.

For further information

Visit www.nprs.qld.gov.au/parks/diamantina for more information about this park. Be sure to pick up a Diamantina National Park Guide from Tourist Information Centres (see details page 20) or phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).
Enjoy the rich colours of this sand and sun country of the Wangkangurru and Yarluyandi people. Formerly known as Simpson Desert National Park, this one million hectare national park is Queensland’s largest. At Poeppel Corner the park meets South Australia’s Simpson Desert Conservation Park and the Northern Territory’s Simpson Desert Regional Reserve. The entire Simpson Desert covers more than 17 million hectares of Central Australia.

Access

Munga-Thirri National Park is closed from 1 December to 15 March due to extreme summer temperatures of 40–50 °C. There are no toilets, walking tracks or designated camp areas. Bushwalking is not recommended.

Warning! Only self-sufficient visitors experienced in desert and remote area travel should explore the Simpson Desert. You must be well-equipped to cope with hot days and freezing nights in Australia’s driest place. Vehicle tracks on park are undeveloped and 4WD only. Travel with at least one other vehicle. The closest food and fuel supply is at Birdsville.

If intending to continue beyond Queensland and into the South Australian part of the Simpson Desert, you will need to purchase a Desert Parks Pass (see other permits page 4).

Camping

Camping is permitted within 500 m of the QAA line. Obtain camping permits at www.qld.gov.au/camping.

For further information


Enjoy the rich colours of this sand and sun country.

Goneaway National Park

Isolated and remote, Goneaway National Park protects 24 000 ha of arid, ragged sandstone ridges and gidgee woodland within the Georgina–Diamantina catchment.

Corroboree sites and artefacts reflect the Maiawali and Karuwali people’s enduring connection with this country.

This park has no vehicle access, formed tracks or visitor facilities. There are no public roads into the park.

Hell Hole Gorge National Park

Featuring the mulga lands bioregion, the 12 700 ha Hell Hole Gorge National Park is centred on the rugged Powell Creek drainage system and its associated plateau.

Water shapes this landscape today, dissecting ancient mountain ranges, eroding tablelands and shifting sand and gravel to carve steep channels.

Deep, permanent waterholes, rock pools, cliffs, gorges and gentle plains are home to many rare or important species.

This park has no vehicle access, formed tracks or visitor facilities. There are no public roads into the park.
Elusive mammals

A well-informed visitor with sharp eyes may spot many mammals that reside in the parks of Central West Queensland. Most parks have at least three of the nine macropod species found in the region, but the seven below live at Idalia.

Many macropods

A. Black and white facial markings and white back legs indicate a red kangaroo *Macropus rufus*—even if the coat is grey.

B. Heavy-set common wallaroos *Macropus robustus*, which have no distinguishable markings, forage on grassy slopes of the ranges or along creek beds for herbs and grasses.

C. Black-striped wallabies *Macropus dorsalis* are often seen nibbling short grasses that flashjacks ignore, only competing for food during droughts.

D. Red and grey kangaroos graze on the open plains. Look for a black tail tip to identify an eastern grey kangaroo *Macropus giganteus*.

E. Vulnerable yellow-footed rock-wallabies *Petrogale xanthopus celeris* skilfully traverse steep escarpments and rocks.

F. Endangered bridled nailtail wallabies *Onychogalea fraenata* (flashjacks), a translocated population, feed at night in Idalia, mainly on herbs in scrubby sand country.

G. Swamp wallabies *Wallabia bicolor* chew herbs and grasses along creek beds.

The endangered greater bilby and the vulnerable kowari are at Diamantina. Bladensburg hosts the largest known population of endangered Julia Creek dunnarts.

If heading to Diamantina National Park, keep an eye out for endangered greater bilbies *Macrotis lagotis*.

Idalia’s high diversity of insect-eating bats includes the rare little pied bat. Shy echidnas and possums are at Idalia, Lochem and Welford. Watch for gliders at Idalia and Forest Den.

Short-beaked echidnas *Tachyglossus aculeatus* are shy and often bury themselves when alarmed, leaving only their sharp spines exposed.

You’re likely to see dingoes at Diamantina and Munga-Thirri, and marsupial mice occupy most of the district.

In scrubby sand country you may see a tiny kultarr *Antechinomys laniger* bounding gracefully in search of cockroaches and other bugs.
Brilliant birds
Central West Queensland is a birdwatchers’ paradise, supporting hardy, adaptable species as well as specialised and/or rare species.

Specialists are restricted to specific habitats, like Hall’s babblers in Idalia, Lochern and Welford’s mulga woodlands and the spectacular spotted harrier, a raptor of the grassy plains. Nomadic budgerigars are regularly on the move, chasing their diet of grass seeds.

Paradoxically, this arid land caters for thousands of water birds. In wet times breeding colonies of pelicans, ibis, egrets, herons and spoonbills are among the largest in Australia.

Abundant reptiles, a few frogs and rare fish
Arid lands create a range of habitats to host diverse reptiles. Waterholes conceal Emmott’s short-necked turtles—only found in waterways of the Lake Eyre Basin. Robust yellow-spotted monitors may be seen swaggering through the grassland, woodlands and river flats of Bladensburg, Diamantina, Idalia and Lochern.

Gilbert’s dragons wave their legs in turn to cool their feet as they forage in woodlands and river margins. Mulga snakes live at Lochern and Idalia. Black-headed pythons stretch out across the roads at night to soak up the heat. Hunting at night in Bladensburg, blue-grey coloured northern spiny-tailed geckos spy prey with large, patterned, unblinking eyes. If alarmed, they squirt a sticky repellent from glands along their back and tail.

Right: Gilbert’s dragons, also known as ta ta lizards, escape quickly on their hind feet if alarmed.

Identify a wedge-tailed eagle Aquila audax in flight. Eagles and harriers hold their wings in a v-shape as they soar. Look for the wedge-shaped tail of these massive eagles.

Birdwatch at Surprise Creek and the spinifex grassland at Bladensburg; Hunters Gorge and Lake Constance at Diamantina; Broadwater Waterhole at Lochern; Sawyers Creek and Little Boomerang Waterhole at Welford; and along Idalia and Combo Waterhole’s creeks and waterholes.

Look for rufous-crowned emu-wrens, rainbow bee-eaters, mulga parrots, bustards, emus, splendid fairy-wrens and many others. Along the Simpson Desert QAA track, catch a glimpse of the shy Eyrean grasswren whose furtiveness frustrates photographers.

Emmott’s short-necked turtles Emydura macquarii emmotti are named after Lochern’s neighbouring pastoralist Angus Emmott, who first collected them.

After rain, listen for the ‘unk, unk, unk’ call of the ornate burrowing frog Platyplectrum ornatum.

Hot, dry conditions limit amphibians to well-adapted widespread frog species, like the water holding frog and ornate burrowing frog.

Over a dozen fish species are found here and many, like the Cooper Creek catfish in the Thomson River at Lochern, are not found outside the Cooper catchment.

In an emergency

The Central West Queensland parks do not have reliable mobile phone coverage or a consistent ranger presence. You are strongly recommended to pack a satellite phone and Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon (EPIRB) in case of emergency.

In an emergency, phone 000. If this fails, try 112 or contact the local police station directly. You can also try to make contact with people on UHF radio. The most commonly used channels are listed below; however, you should also seek local advice and scan for people using other channels while you are travelling.

Bladensburg and Lark Quarry
Winton Police Station (07) 4657 1200
UHF Channel 1 (duplex)

Combo Waterhole
Kynuna Police Station (07) 4746 8777

Diamantina
Bouila Police Station (07) 4746 3120
UHF Channel 2 (duplex)

Idalia
Blackall Police Station (07) 4657 4200
UHF Channel 24 or UHF Channel 6 (duplex)

Lochern
Longreach Police Station (07) 4658 2200
UHF Channel 2 (simplex)

Simpson Desert
Birdsville Police Station (07) 4656 3220
UHF Channel 10

Welford
Jundah Police Station (07) 4658 6120
UHF Channel 3 (duplex)

Forest Den
Aramac Police Station (07) 4651 3120

Please note: UHF channels listed above are public channels.

For further information

Visit <www.nprs.qld.gov.au/parks>. Go to ‘Park alerts’ for the latest information on access, closures and conditions.
Or phone 13 QGOV (13 74 68).

Visit the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry at <www.daff.qld.gov.au> for fishing rules and guidelines.

For information on road conditions contact <www.131940.qld.gov.au> or phone 13 19 40, 1300 130 595 for 24-hour road reports.

Tourism information

The following information centres have park information.

Blackall–Tambo Regional Council/Visitor Information Centre
www.btrc.qld.gov.au
145a Shamrock Street,
Blackall QLD 4472
ph (07) 4657 4637
email binfo@btrc.qld.gov.au or
bvic@blackall.qld.gov.au

Longreach Regional Council
www.longreach.qld.gov.au
96a Eagle Street, Longreach QLD 4730
ph (07) 4658 4111
email visitinf@longreach.qld.gov.au

Diamantina Shire Council
www.diamantina.qld.gov.au
17 Herbert Street, Bedourie QLD 4829
ph (07) 4746 1202
email info@diamantina.qld.gov.au or
visitors@diamantina.qld.gov.au

Waltzing Matilda Centre
(contact for Dinosaur Trackways)
www.matildacentre.com.au or
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Disclaimer

All information provided in this guide is correct at time of printing but due to major flood damage in early 2011 all parks are undergoing assessment and infrastructure rebuilding. Check for park alerts online or at the nearest information centre.

Front cover main photo: Landscape of Welford National Park. Photo: John Augusteiny.

Front cover inset photo: Part of the old homestead at Lochern National Park. Photo: Jo Kurpershoek.

Back cover photo: Desert dune. Photo: Qld Govt.

Back cover inset photo: Explore the sand and sun country of the Munga-Thirri National Park. Photo: Robert Ashdown

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