Aboriginal Site Protection

Heritage sites are very significant to Aboriginal people; they are of great interest to non-Aboriginal people and they are protected by law. The layout of this trail was done in close liaison with the Ngarluma people, the Traditional Owners of the land. We trust that giving people a better understanding will engender greater respect for Aboriginal culture.

Indigenous Habitation

Sites identified along the trail indicate that these hills were inhabited on either a permanent or seasonal basis by Aboriginal people. Sites include engravings, stone quarries, artefact scatterings, a Thalhu site, shell midden with grinding material, and an area of grinding patches and basal grinding stones. The engravings consist of a wide range of motifs and styles, and involve a number of different engraving techniques.

Karratha’s Development

The whole face of the Pilbara changed as a result of the Commonwealth Government’s lifting of the iron ore export embargo in 1960. Known reserves of ore were further investigated and proven to be massive deposits of high grade ore. Four companies secured large long-term export contracts resulting in the planning of major new mines, towns, ports and railways. Hamersley Iron constructed its port on King Bay and built the town of Dampier to accommodate its workforce. The first ore was exported in 1966, and by 1968 it was obvious that the town was insufficient to house proposed massive expansions. The Australian Government determined that future development would take the form of an open government town (unlike the company town of Dampier) and after investigation of the area the gently sloping land surrounding these hills was described as the most suitable location for a new town that would eventually become the “regional capital” of the Pilbara. Named after the river from which the townsite was excised, Karratha covered an area previously known as ‘White Gum Creek’. ‘Karratha’ originates from the Ngarluma word ‘Gardaatha’.

Planning for the construction of Karratha commenced in 1968 with the first residents being able to move in by mid-1971. The residential cell of Bulgarra was the first developed, followed by Pugs Creek in 1976, Millars Well in 1980, Nickol in 1981 and Baynton in 1987.

While Hamersley Iron was developing its iron ore project, on the nearby tidal flats Dampier Salt Company was constructing the largest saltworks in the southern hemisphere. The discovery of major natural gas reserves on the North West Shelf in the early 1970s heralded another major phase in the consolidation of the Pilbara’s development. Woodside Offshore Petroleum has invested $11 billion in the exploitation of these reserves in the 1990s with the construction of the North Rankin ‘A’ gas platform, a 135km submarine pipeline, a domestic gas plant, a 1,600km pipeline to supply natural gas to Perth and the South West and a liquefied natural gas plant at Point paint on King Bay to produce Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) for export to Japan.

Further development of the gas reserves occurred during the 1990s which underpinned the development of five gas trains at the Karratha Gas Plant followed in 2012 by the completion of Woodside’s $14 billion Pluto Gas Plant on the Burrup Peninsula. Further diversification has occurred with the development of an ammonia and ammonium nitrate plants and a pilot project for biofuels.

Natural Environment

The Karratha Hills are an isolated range of steep sided low hills composed largely of metamorphosed (physically and chemically altered) igneous rocks, originally part of a volcanic complex. These rocks, some 2,700 million years old, were intruded by dykes of dolerites (ridges of coarse, dark igneous rock produced by the cooling of volcanic/semi molten material) about 2,200 million years ago. Some cherts (finely-like forms of quartz) and metamorphosed quartz rock sediments form the low ridges to the south and west of the main range of hills. The surrounding plains are largely underlaid by granites with varying depths of recent river and coastal marine sediments.

The hills are an erosion resistant remnant shaped by an extensive system of joints and faults, the relative resistance to erosion of the individual rock types, and depositional features, especially on the lower flanks and small valleys. The dolerite dykes and quartz and pegmatite veins (coarse crystalline types of granite) are more resistant to erosion than the altered volcanic rocks and stand out as ridges and knobs. Some of the more striking examples are the dolerite dyke nearGearie Road and the Karratha College and the Hospital. Because of their smaller size, the quartz veins and pods tend to form discrete knolls or humps on the slopes except in the lower hills to the south and west where low angular ridges are found.

Natural Vegetation

The vegetation, like the animals of these rocky hills, relies on moisture for survival, and adapts itself in various ways for protection against the sun. Plants which can tolerate extreme aridity are found on the hill slopes where rain penetrates only a small distance while more water dependent plants are found in the valleys and gullies.

After heavy rains (mainly in summer) trees and shrubs turn a deeper green and many flower, while a host of small plants spring to life. After all the flowers of the larger plants disappear, most of these plants are ephemeral - they grow from seed, flower and seed again all within a few months before dying to survive only as seed until the next rains.

You can view relatively pristine vegetation from the trail, something which is becoming rarer today. Some weeds, however, can occur along the edge of the trail and the creek line. Kapok (Aerua javanica) distinguished by its fluffy white flowers along fingerlike branches, was used by camel drivers to stuff their saddles. Buffalo Weeds (Cenchrus ciliaris) was introduced to the region by pastoralists as a fodder grass. You can limit the spread of these weeds by staying on the trail.

Local Fauna

The rocky, sphenix covered slopes of the hills and shrubs and trees of the valleys between provide a home for a surprising number of animals. The Euro or Wallaroo (called ‘Biggada’ by Aborigines) is the most common mammal to be seen on the trail. Euros are a small type of kangaroo especially adapted to living in arid areas. These hills are typical of their usual habitat, having large and often overhanging rocks or ledges which provide shelter from the extreme heat. By late afternoon, the rock mass heats up and only then will they leave for the shade of the trees. In an effort to further reduce their temperature, Euros lick their forelimbs to cool the bloodflowing close to the surface. To avoid solar radiation they usually graze at night, but in the cooler months can be seen grazing on grasses at most times of the day. They emit a distinctive loud hiss if disturbed.

Important information

- Much of the Heritage Trail is rough with loose rocks and could be potentially hazardous to trail users. Persons using this trail do so at their own risk.
- Stay on the trail. By walking off the trail you may trespass on a heritage site, spread weeds and damage vegetation. The main trail does not return to the starting point and trail users may wish to arrange transport to the end of the trail near the Karratha Leisureplex.
- The trail should only be attempted by those who are reasonably fit and able bodied. There is no seating or shaded area for rest breaks.
- Sturdy but comfortable footwear is essential.
- No water supplies are available along the trail so take adequate precautions against sunburn and hea.
- Take adequate precautions against sunburn and heat stress.
- No rubbish bins are available along the trail. Please carry any litter with you.
- Considerable care should be taken before attempting the walk in hot weather.
- Under the Aboriginal Heritage Act it is an offence to damage or alter any Aboriginal site or to remove any Aboriginal object from a site.

This trail is for walkers only. It is illegal to use 4WDs, mountain bikes and motorbikes on this trail.
Woolly Corchorus

Honey Hakea

Caucus Bush – Northern grevillea

Clerodendrum

Trichosanthes cucumerina

Sandpaper Fig (Ficus opposita), with lightish green foliage and beautiful pinkish bark. The coccid bug is clearly distinguished by its waxy coating on their leaves and the shiny green foliage of the Kurrajong (Brachychiton acuminatus) is engaging. 'Waltzing Matilda'.

Coolibah (Eucalyptus victrix) is distinguished by its lightish green foliage and beautiful pinkish bark. The coccid bug is clearly distinguished by its waxy coating on their leaves and the shiny green foliage of the Kurrajong (Brachychiton acuminatus) is engaging. 'Waltzing Matilda'.

Lizard

Caucus Vine

Peperrina

Spinifex Pigeon

Local birdlife

Euro

Echidna

Aboriginal Artefact Scatter

Aboriginal Quarry and Petroglyph Site

Aboriginal Talu Site

Aboriginal Engravings, Quartz and Artefacts Scatter

Aboriginal Grinding Stones