

Coalseam Conservation Park



Above Coal seams are evident at sites along the banks of the Irwin River.

Coalseam Conservation Park

Coalseam Conservation Park is renowned for its spectacular spring wildflower displays. The park encompasses an area of approximately 754 hectares and represents one of the northern Wheatbelt's most florally diverse areas.

Geology

Where does the name Coalseam come from?

Coalseam Conservation Park is one of the few areas where black coal can be seen at the Earth's surface. It is also the site of the first coal mining in Western Australia.

The Irwin River has cut through the local rock exposing a striking cross-section of sedimentary layers, one of which is coal. Other layers of rock including siltstone and sandstone are exposed along cliff faces beside the Irwin River and represent hundreds of millions of years of the Earth's history.

An ancient landmass

The landscape of Coalseam Conservation Park formed when Australia was part of the supercontinent Gondwana. During this time the climate was much different from today and huge glaciers covered the area. The movement of these glaciers ground up the underlying rock to create sediments that form much of the rock you see in the park today. Around 265 million years ago, swamps and peat lands growing on these sediments created the organic material that was to become coal deposits.

To view coal seams along the Irwin River, walk a few hundred metres upstream from the Fossil site. Also visit the park's Riverbend site for the full story of the park's amazing geological history.

Aboriginal history

The area holds significance and strong traditional values for several local Indigenous groups. A variety of plants and animals found in the park are important for food and medicinal purposes. For those with a keen eye, artefacts such as stone flakes, scar trees and grinding stones may be seen. Please help protect the cultural history of the park by leaving these items as you find them.



Above Augustus Gregory.

European history

In 1846, three brothers and explorers, – Augustus, Frank and Henry Gregory – were looking for suitable grazing and agricultural lands in the area when they discovered exposed coal seams along the banks of the Irwin River. This, the first coal discovery in Western Australia, resulted in the area being declared a reserve. Subsequently a number of shafts were dug, but only narrow seams of poor quality coal were revealed. One of these shafts can be seen

from a viewing platform only a short walk from Miners campground.

The Gregorys' exploration of the area made way for the coming of pastoralists and farmers, who developed the sheep and wheat properties that now surround the park. The new settlers brought permanent change to the lifestyles of the local Aboriginal groups.

The park's rugged terrain, which was mostly unsuitable for sheep and wheat, became a refuge for native plants and animals. In time, the area's heritage values were recognised.

Below A mineshaft in the bank of the Irwin River in 1917.



Visitor guide



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions





Above Coalseam comes alive in spring as a carpet of wildflowers erupts in the understorey.

Flora

Coalseam Conservation Park is among the most botanically diverse areas in the northern Wheatbelt region of Western Australia. The park lies between the northern sandplain country where woody heath plants flower profusely in spring, and the arid lands of the Murchison region where spectacular everlastings bloom each spring (dependent on rainfall).

On the plateau, a thin sandplain covers the hard, iron-rich laterite capping. These sandy, dry soils are low in nutrients and support a highly diverse 'kwongan' heath community that includes needle bush (*Hakea preissii*), sandplain wattle (*Acacia murrayana*), broom bush (*Melaleuca uncinata*) and graceful honeymyrtle (*Melaleuca fulgens*). On the Irwin River floodplain, reddish loams have formed from silt and sand washed down from the valley sides and from the upper reaches of the river. These soils are seasonally wet and relatively rich in nutrients. They support a mostly wattle- dominated scrub that includes jam (*Acacia acuminata*) and orange wattle (*Acacia saligna*), with large York gums (*Eucalyptus loxophleba*).



Above Pompom heads (*Cephalipterum drummondii*) flower under tall York gums (*Eucalyptus loxophleba*).

During spring, a carpet of everlastings transforms the usually sparse wattle understorey, covering the valley slopes. The plant is mostly from the daisy family, and dries out to produce papery petals and seeds that are dispersed by the wind. Have a closer look at the flowers you see and use the wildflower guide in this brochure to identify the more common species.



Above Galahs nest in hollows around Miners Campground.

Fauna

Much of Coalseam's animal life can be difficult to observe as mammals are mostly nocturnal and many reptiles can be very cryptic. For most visitors, birds are the only wildlife seen. Despite this, visitors with some patience and a sharp eye may spot mammals such as the echidna, euro and red kangaroo. Reptiles such as the bobtail, Gould's sand goanna, western blue-tongue lizard, western netted dragon, mulga snake and gwardar are relatively common and may be seen.

A range of birds can easily be observed at Coalseam Conservation Park. Look for both the singing and the spiny-cheeked honeyeaters in areas where there are flowering trees and shrubs. Wedge-tailed eagles soar overhead and peregrine falcons can occasionally be seen along the cliff face in front of the Irwin Lookout. Galahs nest in tree hollows near Miners campground and red-capped robins can be seen flitting around near ground level. Australian ringnecks (or mallee ringnecks) are common in the park as are nankeen kestrels, black-faced woodswallows, black-faced cuckoo-shrikes and crested and common bronzewings.

Look carefully and quietly to discover some of the animals within the park. Please do not disturb them or damage their habitat.

Below Bobtail skinks are a common reptile in the park.



Coalseam wildflower guide

A guide to Coalseam's most common everlastings and other herb-like flowers less than 1m tall.



Cephalipterum drummondii
Pompom head
Forms carpets of pompom-like white (and occasionally yellow) flowers.



Myriocephalus guerinae
Bright yellow annual usually less than 40cm tall.



Lawrencella davenportii
This common pink to white annual has its leaves clustered at the base of the stem.



Rhodanthe chlorocephala (subsp. *rosea*)
A bright pink or white annual growing to about 50cm tall.



Waitzia acuminata
Orange immortelle
A distinctive yellow or orange annual that flowers later in the wildflower season.



Thysanotus manglesianus
Fringed lily
This twining plant produces delicate purple flowers during spring.

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Erodium cygnorum

Blue heronsbill
The small blue or purple flowers of this plant are thinly scattered through the park.



Podolepis canescens

Another yellow wildflower that grows to about 85cm tall and can be common in the park.



Schoenia cassiniana

Schoenia
A common pink wildflower in the region that only grows to about 40cm tall.



Calandrinia polyandra

Parakeelya
This small and delicate annual displays its pink flowers through spring.



Echium plantagineum

Paterson's curse
This invasive weed is common in disturbed areas and along roadsides within the park. Measures are being undertaken to control this plant.

Visitor information

Access

Coalseam Conservation Park is located 115km inland from Geraldton, approximately 30km north-east of Mingenew or 60km south of Mullewa. The park has year-round access for all vehicles via well-formed gravel roads. However, during periods of heavy rain the Irwin River may flood and be impassable for a short period of time until the water level drops. Please take notice of water depths before crossing and drive within your capability.

Due to steep slopes and narrow roads, caravans are not recommended at Irwin Lookout or the Fossil site. Please leave your caravan at Miners or Breakaway.



Camping

The park's main campground is at Miners, where there are unpowered sites suitable for caravans. Picnic tables and toilets are also provided. Generator use is only permitted between 9am and 11am and between

4pm and 6pm. When the campground is full, overflow camping is permitted at the Breakaway site. All other sites are open for day use only.

Camping is only permitted for a maximum of three consecutive nights during the peak season (August to October) allowing everyone the opportunity to enjoy the park's wildflowers. Volunteer campground hosts are located at Miners campground at this time.

Things to do

Johnson Shaft Viewing Platform

Take the Miners Walk Trail (700m return, allow 30 minutes) from the Miners picnic area across the usually dry bed of the Irwin River to a viewing platform over the disused Johnson coal shaft. Signs explain the history of the shaft which was sunk in 1917. You can see part of a coal seam at the bottom of the shaft. Similar coal seams occur as outcrops on the side of the riverbank and are visible as black and grey banded rocks. Look for them on your return walk.



Riverbend

Close to the usually dry Irwin River, this day-use site has picnic tables, barbecues, toilets and an information shelter with signs covering the area's geology, flora and fauna.

Riverbend gets its name from a section of the Irwin River that has carved a striking cliff face into the Victoria Plateau. A cross-section of the underlying rock layers is exposed, offering an insight into the interesting geology of the park. The layers of rock span five evolutionary periods and provide valuable visual evidence of how the local landscape was formed.



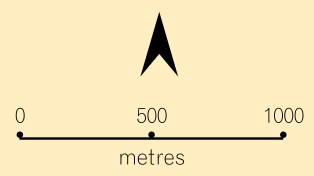
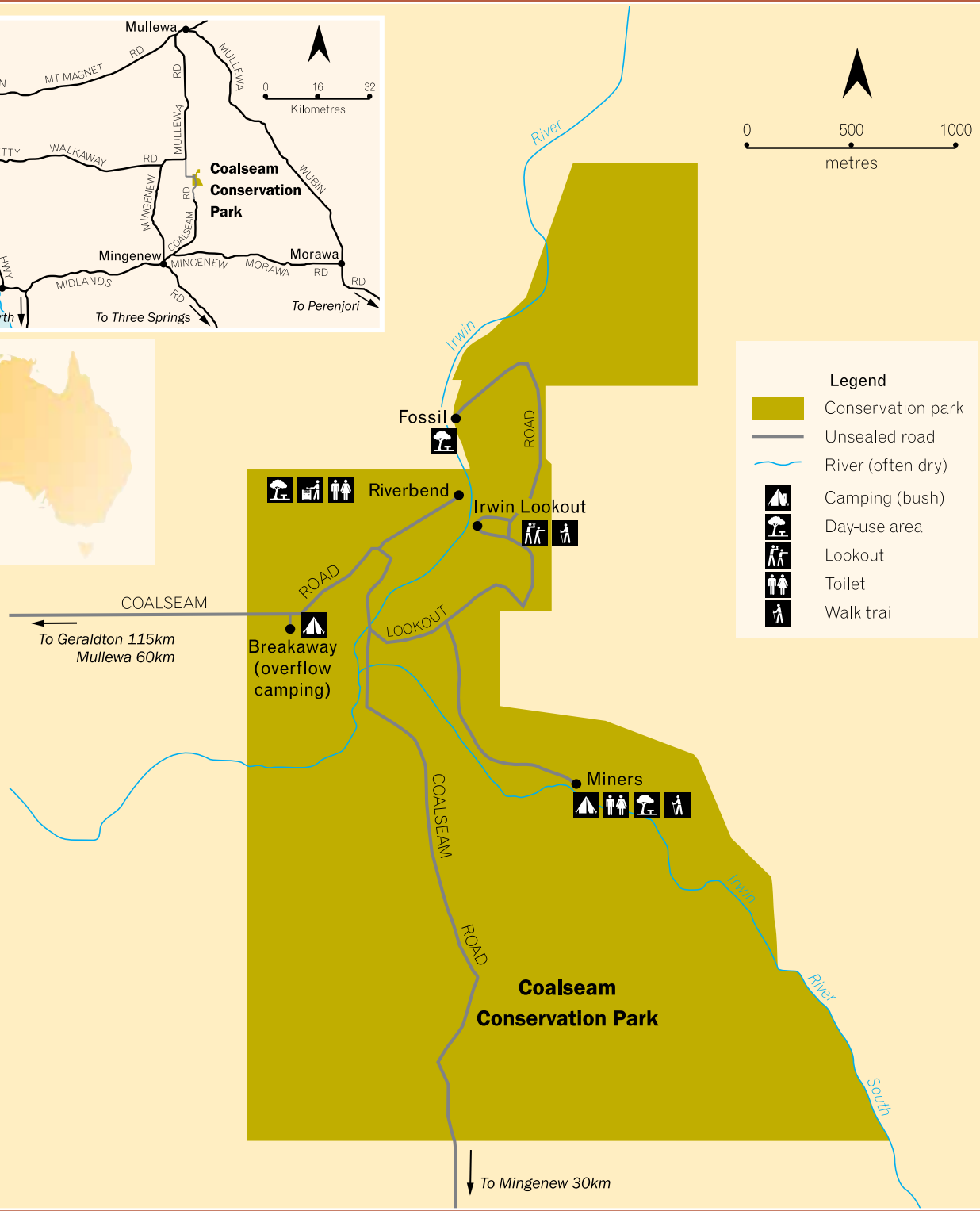
Irwin Lookout

A 560-metre loop walk leads from the car park to lookouts along a cliff edge above the Irwin River, where you'll enjoy dramatic views of the valley below. Signs explain the geology of the area. Keep an eye out for soaring peregrine falcons and wedge-tailed eagles.

Fossil

The Fossil picnic site is situated on the banks of the Irwin River. Here you can either rest and admire the view or go for a walk along the Irwin River where you may find marine fossils in the riverbank, exposed over time by erosion. You will have to look carefully though as the fossils are generally very small. Exposed coal seams can also be seen in the cliffs along the river if you head north from this site.





Legend

- Conservation park
- Unsealed road
- River (often dry)
- ▲ Camping (bush)
- ☀ Day-use area
- 👤 Lookout
- 🚻 Toilet
- 🚶 Walk trail

Caring for the park

Be kind – it is an offence to disturb or remove animals, plants or rocks, including fossils or cultural artefacts. Leave them as you find them for others to enjoy. **No firearms or pets are permitted in the park.**

Be responsible – use the gas barbecues provided at River Bend or use your own gas stove. Dead wood is habitat for wildlife not fuel for fires. **Fires are not permitted within the park.**

Be clean – take your rubbish out of the park when you leave.

Be careful – your enjoyment and safety are our concern but your responsibility.

Be cool – always carry ample drinking water. To avoid dehydration, drink three to four litres of water per person, per day.

Stay on track – follow signs and stay on the marked trails.

Fees

There are no entry fees for the park; however, camping fees apply to assist with management of the park and to help improve visitor facilities. Fees are collected by campground hosts.

More information

**Parks and Wildlife Service
Midwest Region Office
Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**
Ph: (08) 9964 0901
1st Floor, The Foreshore Centre
201 Foreshore Dve
Geraldton WA 6530

**Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Headquarters**
Ph: (08) 9219 9000
17 Dick Perry Ave
Kensington WA 6151



Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions



Front cover Coalseam campground. Photo – Peter Nicholas

This information is current at August 2017.
This publication is available in alternative formats on request.