EXCURSION GUIDE

Ormiston Gorge

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park

Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory
Our Parks and Reserves as a resource for your excursion

Inspire your students!

From a day trip to an overnight or week long stay, excursions camps and field trips are a great way for teachers to present hands-on learning experiences and share knowledge in a unique way.

Parks and Wildlife Commission NT Parks and Reserves are ideal locations to enhance any education program, whether the visit be related to culture, history, science, outdoor education, or the creative arts.

This guide contains information to support excursions to Ormiston Gorge, in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park an area jointly managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory and the Western Aranda Traditional Owners.

We hope to see you out there!

Provide your feedback!

We would love to receive your feedback and comments on this excursion guide, contact the PWCNT Community Engagement Officer in Alice Springs on 08 8951 8247.

Ormiston Gorge

This park showcases the spectacular geology and landforms of the MacDonnell Ranges and has a near-permanent water hole at its southern end. This area contains a variety of native fauna and flora including a number of relict plant species.

The park is an important refuge for threatened species such as the Long-tailed Dunnart and Central Rock-rat.

Ormiston Gorge has separate campground facilities able to cater for schools and group bookings.

The cooler months (April to September) are the most pleasant time to visit.

---

Ormiston Gorge is in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park.

Getting there

Located 135 km west of Alice Springs. Park access via Larapinta and Namatjira Drives. No 4 x 4 vehicle is required.

Main visitor facilities and the day use car park are situated 8 km from the Namatjira Drive turn off.

Coaches can access the day use car park.

Fuel available from Glen Helen Resort, located 10 km from Ormiston Gorge.

Contacts

OG Ranger Station
(08) 8956 7799

PWCNT Head Office
(08) 8951 8250
SAFETY

DUTY OF CARE

• Teachers employed by the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) who take part in excursions have a responsibility to ensure that departmental Educational Excursions policy and Educational excursions guidelines are met (see http://www.det.nt.gov.au/about-us/policies/documents/schools/school-management/educational-excursions for policies and associated forms). Other States and Territories will have equivalent policies to be abided by.

• In addition to this, teachers have the responsibility to exercise proper care and supervision throughout the duration of the excursion. The duty of care of the teacher requires the reasonable steps to protect the student against risk of injury or harm that the teacher could reasonably foresee. The rules and regulations of the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT while within Park/Reserve/Garden boundaries must also be abided by.

RISK MANAGEMENT

• DECS Occupational and Safety policy requires the completion of an Excursion self inspection checklist (also found via the aforementioned link) prior to any excursion. The site-specific information provided below should assist you in completing this checklist.

SAFETY and COMFORT

• Observe park safety signs.

• Avoid strenuous activity during the heat of the day.

• Carry and drink plenty of water (PWCNT recommends consumption of one litre per hour, more if undertaking strenuous activity).

• Wear clothing suitable to the conditions, recommended items include; a hat, sunscreen, enclosed and sturdy shoes and insect repellent.

• Walking boots are recommended for the more difficult walks / overnight hikes (e.g. Larapinta Trail).

• There is no mobile phone coverage. Consider a satellite phone or personal locator beacon for emergency communication.

• Do not feed native animals.

Annual Temperatures in Alice Springs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>April to September (cool season)</th>
<th>October to March (hot season)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daytime Max: 15-35°C</td>
<td>Daytime Max: 28-45°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night time lows can get down to -5°C</td>
<td>Night time lows: 14-28°C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average rainfall for the area is approximately 300 mm per annum and can occur at any time of the year.

FACILITIES

The day use area includes vehicle parking suitable for coaches, caravans and cars. As well as shaded picnic areas and barbecues. The general visitors campground operates on a first come, first served basis. A special interest campground for school and large groups can be booked through the Ranger Station (08 8956 7799). Camping fees - $10 per adult, $5 per student. Commercial facilities are available at Glen Helen Resort.

Flushing toilets, showers, hand wash sinks and running water is provided at the camp sites, the day use area has a public toilet.

EATING AREAS - Gas barbecues are available for use. The Kiosk has basic supplies, food, drinks and can arrange other catering options. Phone (08) 8954 6196.

DRINKING WATER - There is a limited supply of drinking water at Ormiston Gorge. Plan to bring all drinking water requirements with you. We recommended treating all tank and surface water before drinking.

Please Remember

• Keep to designated roads and tracks.

• All historic, cultural items and wildlife are protected.

• Fires are not permitted, use the gas barbecues provided.

• Pets are not permitted on Park

• Generators are NOT permitted.

• Bins are provided in the campground. Day users must take your rubbish with you.

• There is no phone coverage.

• Do not feed native animals.
So you’ve decided to go! Here is some further information to help plan your excursion...

**Ormiston Gorge, what’s it all about?**

The Aranda people refer to the West MacDonnell Ranges as Tjoritja (pronounced Choor-it-ja). In their lore and culture, the landscape was created by ancestral beings during a mythological time, the foundation of their spiritual beliefs and identity. Ormiston Gorge forms part of Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park which runs along the MacDonnell Ranges.

The park is managed for its cultural, natural, historical and recreational values. The Gorge is home to threatened species including the Central Rock-Rat and Long-tailed Dunnart as well as other species like the Black-footed Rock-wallaby and MacDonnell Ranges Cycad.

The Park Rangers and traditional owners manage the Gorge for weeds, fire and feral animals according to the Joint Management Plan. You may be able to see evidence of these projects on site e.g. weed removal or burnt areas.

**Suggested excursion themes**

**Joint Management**

The park was handed back to the Aboriginal Traditional Owners on 18 July 2012 and leased back to the Northern Territory Government to be jointly managed as a national park for 99 years. The Parks and Wildlife Commission and Traditional Owners are responsible for managing the Park. Together they have developed a Joint Management Plan and renamed the Park to reflect the underlying tenure, joint management arrangements and Traditional Owners’ ongoing cultural connection with the Park.

**Culture, heritage and history**

Ormiston Gorge has a rich cultural history, people traditionally used the gorge for bushtucker, hunting and as a refuge. Nearby Glen Helen Station used the gorge as a cattle watering place before being opened for tourism in 1947.

**Environment / Nature**

A visit to Ormiston Gorge can include investigations into water hole ecology, arid ecosystems, animal and plant adaptation, or different aspects of land management such as fire, weeds and feral animal control. The Gorge is an interesting site for Geology studies because the gorge displays various rock types and show the folding and shaping of the ranges. Easily found ripple rocks are a sign of a shallow sea that used to cover central Australia.

**Get Active!**

Walks at Ormiston Gorge vary from easy to difficult, catering for every age group. The Pound Walk is a 3 - 4 hour loop walk, perfect for an older age group as a half day walk who require a challenge. As a stop on the Larapinta Trail, Ormiston Gorge is a location to refresh and restock. The semi-permanent water hole could be used for water activities.

**Creative Arts**

The landscape, colours and shapes often serve as inspiration for budding artists. Lookouts provide areas to capture the wide landscape. Please remember that any commercial filming and photography on park must be in line with PWCNT permit policies visit our website for more information.

**EXTERNAL SOURCES**

See pages 5 and 6 for specific activities and information for your visit, here are some external links that may provide further information.

- [www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au](http://www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au)
- [www.facebook.com/ParksandWildlifeNT](http://www.facebook.com/ParksandWildlifeNT)
- Ormiston Gorge Visitor Fact sheet
Learn and Discover

There are many different resources and supporting materials available to enhance the Ormiston Gorge school excursion experience. Use the natural classroom for hands on learning! Take lessons out in nature and learn new skills. The best way to introduce students to the Gorge inhabitants is to learn facts about the local plants and animals before visiting. Incorporate this into your pre-visit to make the most of your time on park.

Animals
The West MacDonnell Ranges are a complex habitat with important niches for native animals, many different animals may be seen during the day or on a spotlight walk as part of your visit. Learn more about the more common, rare and significant animals before you visit by doing your own research before you visit.

*Central Rock-Rat, Centralian Carpet Python, Long-tailed Dunnart, Brush-tailed Possum, Marbled velvet Gecko (pictured), Spinifex Pigeon*

*“Regional field guide to birds - Red Centre to the Top End” by G. Pizzey & F. Knight*

*“Reptiles of Australia” by S. Wilson & G. Swan*

*“Australian Bats” by S. Churchill*

Plants
Over 850 plant types, are known to occur in the Park, reflecting the diversity of habitat types in these rugged ranges. The Ormiston Gorge area supports several of these habitats, learn more about these and discover the different plant species within them. Here are some rare, common and weed species of plant of interest -

*Spinifex, Calitris (native pine), Witchetty Bush, Flannel Flower, River Red Gum, Ghost Gum, Macdonnell Ranges Cycad (pictured), Buffel Grass (introduced species)*

*“A guide to plants of inland Australia” by P. Moore*

*“Central Australian Flora - Forbs and Small Shrubs” Australian Plants Society Alice Springs*

Geology
Ormiston Gorge contains some amazing geology with easy to recognise examples that tell the story of the mountain building event (orogeny) that formed the MacDonnell Ranges we see today. Here are suggested resources for more information.

*“A Layman’s Guide to the Geology of Central Australia” by D. R. Woolley*

*“A Guide to the Geology and Landforms of Central Australia” by R. B. Thompson*

Historical information
European settlement of the area around Ormiston Gorge meant that due to a semi-permanent waterhole, the Gorge was used as a cattle watering site by nearby Glen Helen Station. The Old Pioneer Yards are visible on the entry road to the Gorge on the right hand side. The history of Glen Helen Station (10 km from Ormiston Gorge) can be incorporated as part of your visit to the area.

Joint Management / Cultural information
The connection of Traditional Owners to the land is strong across central Australia and recognised by the joint management of this Park. To increase your understanding of joint management and these special places, include an interaction with a Traditional Owner of the region. A fee for service will apply.
Try some activities on site like searching for tracks and traces, a waterbug survey in the Gap, or take the class on a spotlight walk in the evening or a morning birdwatch to practice skills in wildlife spotting. Incorporate these or other activities into your park visit, there are many resources currently available online with tips and ideas for outdoor learning.

Walks and Experiences

SWIMMING

The Gorge has a near-permanent water hole situated 500 metres from the Walks information Shelter. The water hole is ideal for swimming, especially in warmer months. Be aware that most water holes are extremely cold. Prolonged exposure, even during summer, can result in hypothermia. Beware of submerged logs and rocks, and do not jump, dive or swing into the water.

For NT Teachers, please refer to the DECS School Swimming, Water Safety and Aquatic Procedures.

WALKS

**Water hole walk**, < 1 km, 5 min, EASY, wheelchair access to the end of the paved path. This walk takes you into the Gorge to the semi-permanent water hole.

**Ghost Gum Walk**, 2.5 km, 1.5 h loop, MODERATE. This walk follows the western side of the gorge. A key feature of this walk is a lookout which can be completed as a return walk in 30-40 mins. The loop walk returns via the main water hole, check conditions as this may require you to wade through water.

**Pound Walk**, 7 km, 3 - 4 hour loop, MODERATE. This track meanders around the scenic rocky slopes of the Heavitree Range before dropping into the relatively flat expanse of the Pound. It continues along the floor of Ormiston Gorge to the main water hole.

LONG WALKS AND TRAILS

**Bowmans Gap**, 9 km, 1 - 2 days return, MODERATE. This track has no track markers - Navigation/map reading skills required. Contact a Ranger for a map and route information.

**Mount Giles**, 15.3 km (one way), 2-3 days return, DIFFICULT. This track has no track markers - Navigation/map reading skills required. Contact a Ranger for a map and route information, camping permit required, to apply for a permit visit our website www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/permits/camping ($3.30 per adult, $1 per child).

**Larapinta Trail**, Sections 9 and 10 of this 223 km trail within Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park. For more information on the Larapinta Trail, especially information for school groups visit the Trail web page.

Guided Talks

The Territory Parks Alive program of Ranger guided talks and walks are conducted from May to September. Visit the Parks Alive website to view the current program.

**Tap into local knowledge** - Schedule a discussion into the visit! Park Rangers may be available to provide a short talk to your group on a nominated subject, providing Ranger availability. Contact the Ormiston Gorge Ranger Station on 08 8956 7799.

Nearby locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Redbank Gorge</td>
<td>A refuge for many threatened plant and animal species</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mt Sonder</td>
<td>A challenging climb, Section 12 of the Larapinta Trail.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ochre Pits</td>
<td>Rich in cultural tradition and history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tnorala (Gosse Bluff) Conservation Reserve</td>
<td>A place of conservation significance and scientific interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellery Creek Big Hole</td>
<td>A spectacular water hole with camping facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs Desert Park</td>
<td>Learn more about the desert’s environments, animals and living culture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>