



Simpsons Gap, Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park

EXCURSION GUIDE

Simpsons Gap

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park

Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory

Updated: Jan 2021



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QUICK VIEW...

Simpsons Gap is in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park.

Getting there

Located 18 km west of Alice Springs. Park access along Larapinta Drive.

2WD accessible.

Main visitor facilities and the day use car park are situated 7 km from the Larapinta Drive turn off.

Coaches can access the day use car park.

The 17 km (one way) sealed bike path is another way to reach the Gap.

Contact

Simpsons Gap Ranger Station (08) 8955 0310

Alice Springs Regional Office
(08) 8951 8250

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.

Northern Territory 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 Simpsons Gap, in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park an area jointly managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory and Central Arrernte Traditional Owners.

See you out there!

Provide feedback

Provide feedback on this excursion guide by contacting the Community Engagement Officer in Alice Springs; (08) 8951 8247.

Simpsons Gap

One of the most well-known gaps in the MacDonnell Ranges, this park is only 20 minutes from Alice Springs township. It is a great place to see Black-footed Rock-wallabies at dusk. The park contains Mulga Woodland and rare and relict plants. The area is an important site for Aboriginal people, as several dreaming trails cross here.

There are many walks, from the 15 minute Ghost Gum loop to the multi-day Larapinta Trail. A great place for a picnic, Simpsons Gap has free gas barbecues and shady picnic areas near the Gap and Ranger Station.

A school campground area is available for school groups, contact the Simpsons Gap Ranger Station to book. All other camping at the Gap is restricted for Larapinta Trail walkers.

The Park is accessible all year round. The cooler months, April to September, are the most pleasant time to visit.

Annual Temperatures in Alice Springs

April to September (cool season)

Daytime Max: 15-35°C

Night time lows: -5°C

October to March (hot season)

Daytime Max: 28-45°C

Night time lows: 14-28°C

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



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 <https://education.nt.gov.au/education/policies/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 Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT must also be abided by while within Park boundaries.

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.

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**IN AN EMERGENCY
CONTACT THE POLICE**

SAFETY and COMFORT

- Observe park safety signs.
- Avoid strenuous activity during the heat of the day.
- Carry and drink plenty of water (recommended 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).
- Swimming is not permitted.
- There is no mobile phone coverage at Simpsons Gap. Consider a satellite phone or personal locator beacon for emergency communication.**
- Do not feed native animals.



A Mobile Hot Spot is located near the toilets in the day use area at Simpsons Gap. This will provide mobile signal if used correctly. The hotspot works for Telstra customers only.



RIDING THE BIKE TRACK AS PART OF YOUR VISIT?

Check out the Simpsons Gap Bike Path excursion guide for hints, tips and safety information.

DAY USE AREA

The day use area has parking for coaches and cars, with a number of shaded picnic areas and gas barbecues. Flushing toilets, hand washing facilities and drinking water (connected to town mains) is available on site. Rubbish and recycle bins are provided.

SCHOOL CAMPGROUND

Separate from the day use area, the campground is accessed via a dirt road suitable for 2WD vehicles including buses. It does not have electricity or lighting although generators are permitted. Facilities include; two pit toilets and a wood heated shower, tap connected to town mains (suitable for drinking), shelters and a gas barbecue. An open fire pit is available for use but you must bring your own firewood with you, firewood is not to be collected from the park. Rubbish and recycle bins are provided but all surplus rubbish must be taken with you. For more information on the school campground facilities or to book; contact the Alice Springs Regional Office on (08) 8951 8250.

A camping fee applies.

Please Remember

- Keep to designated roads and tracks.
- All historic, cultural items and wildlife are protected.
- Fires are not permitted in the day use area, use the gas barbecues provided.
- Pets are not permitted.
- Swimming is prohibited.
- There is no phone coverage, with the exception of the Mobile Hot Spot.
- Drones with permit only


Simpsons Gap

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park

Locality Map

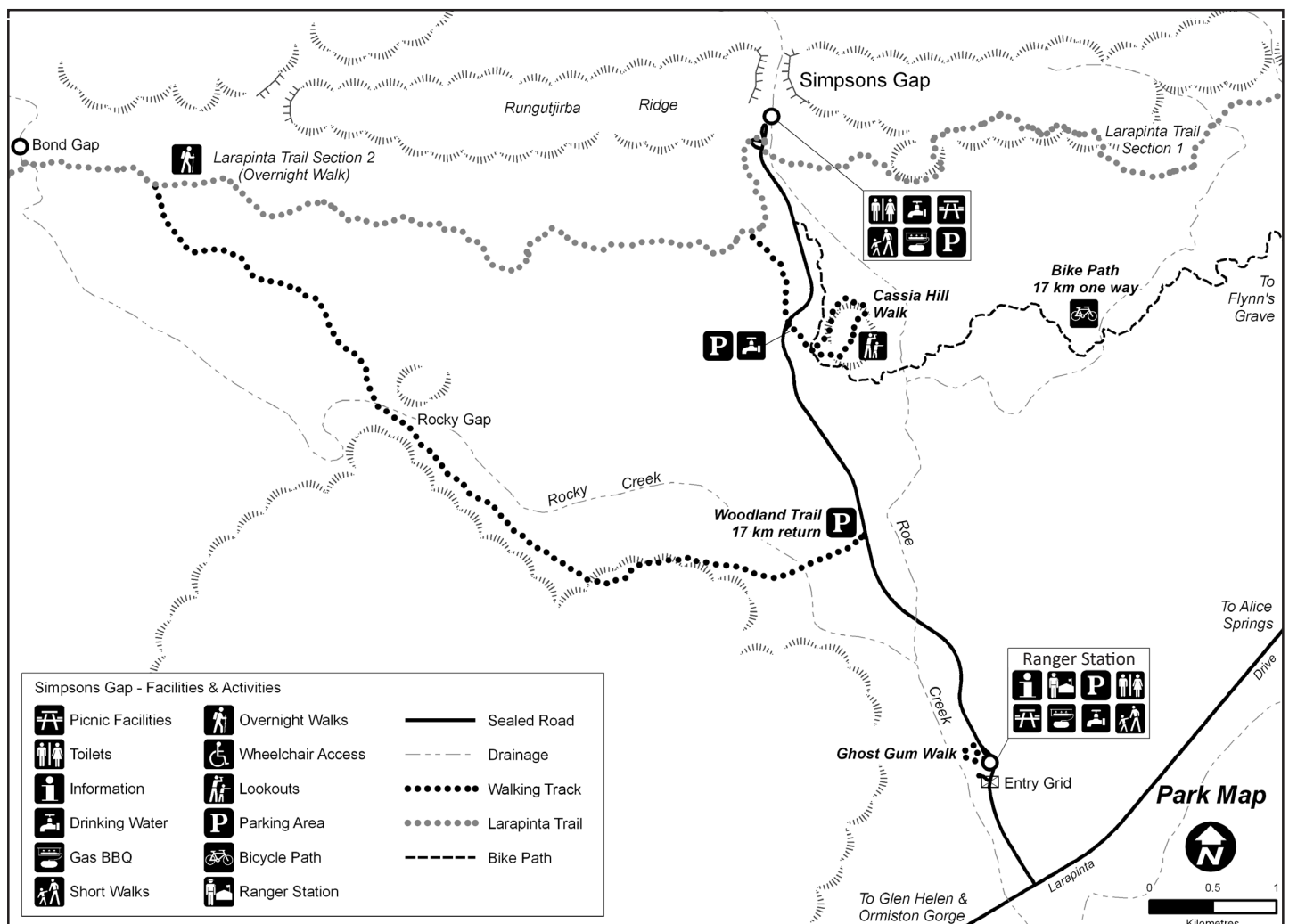
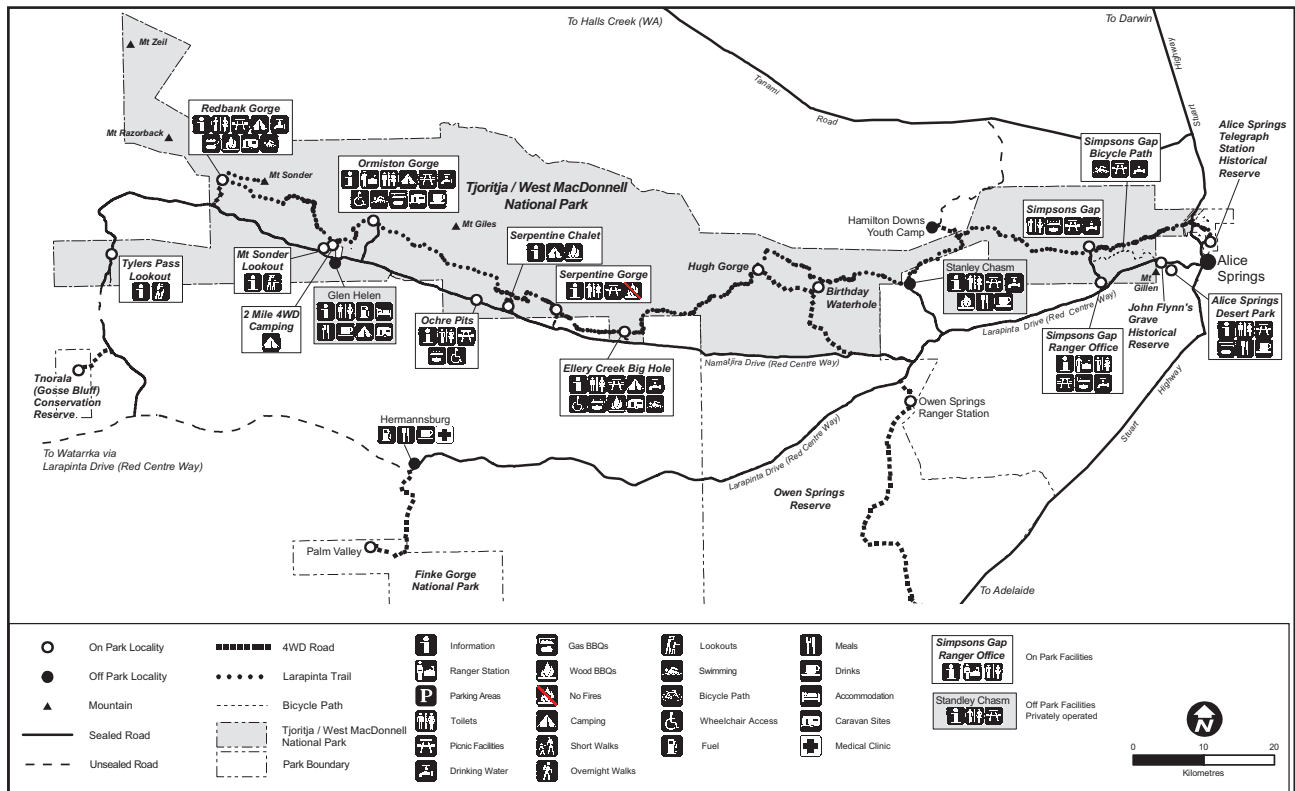
NT Maps

on the Go



Download the **Avenza Maps App** on your device whilst you are still in range to find the **FREE** local park map you need.

Once downloaded, the maps can be used without a network connection. Your device's built in GPS will plot your real-time location within the park onto the map. These GPS enabled maps will assist you to stay on track.



Things to do... incorporate activities like searching for animal tracks and traces, a waterbug survey in the waterhole, a spotlight walk in the evening or an early morning bird watch.

WALKS



Ghost Gum Walk, < 1 km, 15 min return, Grade 2 - EASY, access at the Ranger Station. This illustrates the native plants of the area including an ancient Ghost Gum.

Cassia Hill, 1.5 km, 1 hour return, Grade 3 - MODERATE. This walk gives excellent elevated views of the range and Simpsons Gap area. The walk illustrates local plants and a self-guided walk sheet is available.

Woodland Trail, this walk has a few different options. To Rocky Gap (5 hours return) a shorter version which allows you to experience the woodland habitat. To Bond Gap (17 km, 7 hours return) where the trail meets with the Larapinta Trail.

LONG WALKS AND TRAILS



Hat Hill Saddle, 4.2 km return, 2 h, MODERATE. This is part of Section 1 of the Larapinta Trail, a shorter introduction, there and back walk with a challenging steady climb.

Larapinta Trail, the Larapinta Trail is over 230km and is made up of 12 Sections. Sections 1 and 2 start from Simpsons Gap. Walkers must be well prepared. For more information on the Larapinta Trail especially information for school groups visit the website.

Guided Talks

Tap into local knowledge... Park Rangers may be available to provide a short talk to your group on a nominated subject. Contact the Simpsons Gap Ranger Station on (08) 8955 0310.

Nearby locations

Standley Chasm	A refuge for many threatened plant and animal species, entry fees apply.
Owen Springs Reserve	The site of the first Station Homestead in Central Australia, this Reserve is rich in European history.
Ellery Creek Big Hole	A spectacular waterhole with camping facilities and easy to see geological features.
Alice Springs Telegraph Station	The site of the original town of Alice Springs (then known as Stuart), the well preserved buildings bring this era to life.
Alice Springs Desert Park	Learn more about the desert's environments, animals and living culture.

Visit www.nt.gov.au/parks or www.alicespringsdesertpark.com.au for more information.

Information to help plan your excursion...

Simpsons Gap, what's it all about?

Simpsons Gap is in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park which runs along the MacDonnell Ranges. The park is managed for its cultural, natural, historical and recreational values. Gaps and gorges provide important niches in the MacDonnell Ranges and the gap itself is home to significant species including the Black-footed Rock-wallaby, plants like Glory of the Centre and Rock fig.



Rock Fig

Areas of Mulga woodland provide important habitat for many different animals including birds. Park Rangers and scientists monitor areas to learn more about these species and how best to manage the environment. Park Rangers and Traditional Owners manage the gap area for weeds, fire and feral animals. You may be able to see evidence of these projects on site e.g. weed removal or burnt areas.

Suggested excursion themes

Joint Management

Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park was handed back to the Aboriginal Traditional Owners on 18 July 2012 and leased by the Northern Territory Government to be jointly managed as a National Park for 99 years. 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 connection with the Park.

Culture, heritage and history

The Simpsons Gap area is an important site for Aboriginal people, as several dreaming trails cross here. The area was used as a pastoral station before being declared a National Park in 1970.

Environment / Nature

A visit to Simpsons Gap can include investigation into waterhole ecology, arid ecosystems, animal and plant suitability for the desert. The geology of the area is very ancient and parts of the gap show the orogeny, or mountain building event that occurred here.

Park Management

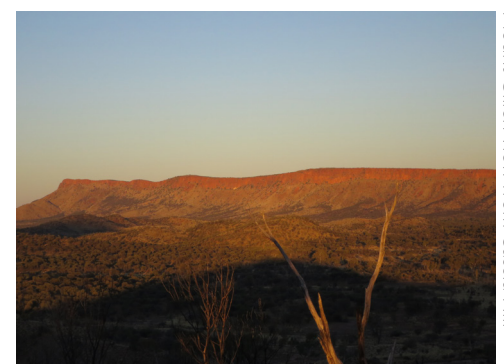
Land management includes managing fire, weeds or feral animal control. This site is also interesting for visitor management and posing the question, 'how to strike the balance between people enjoying the park and biodiversity?'

Get Active!

Walks at Simpsons Gap vary from easy to difficult, catering for every age group. More challenging walks include the Woodland Trail and Larapinta Trail sections.

Creative Arts

The gap landscape, colours and shapes often serve as inspiration for budding artists. The summit of Cassia Hill is regarded as a good place for sunset photography. Please remember that any commercial filming and photography on park must be in line with permit policies, visit our website for more information.



Mount Gillen view from Cassia Hill

Learn and Discover

There are many supporting materials available to enhance your excursion. 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 Gap inhabitants is to learn some facts about the local plants and animals before visiting. Incorporate this into your pre-visit activities to make the most of your time at the park.

Animals

The Ranges are a complex habitat with important niches for native animals. Many 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.

Black-footed Rock-wallaby, Stimsons Python, Marbled Velvet Gecko, Centralian Carpet Python, Desert Tree Frog, Mistletoe Bird, Centralian Tree Frog
"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



Centralian Tree Frog

Plants

Over 850 plant types are known to occur in the Park, reflecting the diversity of habitat types in these rugged ranges. Simpsons Gap supports several of these habitats.

Spinifex, Calitris (Native Pine), Mulga, Witchetty Bush, Spearbush, River Red Gum, Bloodwood, MacDonnell Ranges Cycad, Glory of the Centre, 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



Witchetty Bush

Geology

The Gap itself is one of the most prominent of the region. Quartzite is present in the gap and other rock types can be identified on walks around the Park. The rock faces show the orogeny, or mountain building event.

"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

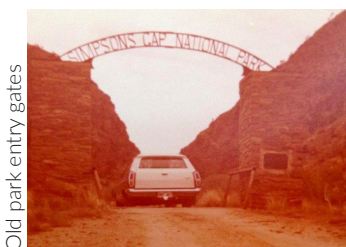


Folded rocks

European History

The name 'Simsons Gap' first appears on a sketch of the area made in 1871 by Gilbert McMinn a member of the Overland Telegraph survey party. Unfortunately he left no evidence of who Simson was or why the spelling was later changed to Simpson.

The Park was originally a pastoral lease (called Simpsons Gap Station), used for fattening stock on their way to market. In 1970 the entire property became a National Park under the Conservation Commission and was joined with other western parks in 1992.



Old park entry gates

Joint Management and Aboriginal Culture

The connection of Aboriginal people 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.



Bush Passionfruit



For more information contact:

Alice Springs Community Engagement Officer (08) 8951 8247

Simpsons Gap Rangers (08) 8955 0310