In 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 Simpsons Gap, in Tjoritja / West MacDonnell National Park an area jointly managed by the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the NT and Central 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.

Simpsons Gap

One of the most well-known gaps in the MacDonnell Ranges, this park is only 20 minutes from Alice Springs. It is a great place to see Black-footed Rock-wallabies at dusk. The park has 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 schools, 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.
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 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).
• 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.

Annual Temperatures in Alice Springs
April to September (cool season)    October to March (hot season)
Daytime Max: 15-35°C     Daytime Max: 28-45°C
Night time lows can get down to -5°C  Night time lows: 14-28°C

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

DAY USE AREA FACILITIES

The day use area has parking for coaches, caravans 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. Bins are provided.

SCHOOL CAMPGROUND FACILITIES

A campground for school groups can be booked through the Ranger Station, at no cost. This is separate from the day use area. Pit toilets, a wood heated shower and drinking water are available. A gas barbecue plate and open fire pit, is available on site. The campground does not have electricity or lighting, generators are permitted. Bins are provided on site, but extra rubbish must be taken with you.

RIDING THE BIKE TRACK AS PART OF YOUR VISIT?

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

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 on Park
• Swimming is prohibited.
• There is no phone coverage.
So you’ve decided to go! Here is some further 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.

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. The Parks and Wildlife Commission and traditional owners are responsible for managing the Park. Together they have developed a Draft 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**

Simpsons Gap and 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 water hole ecology, arid ecosystems, animals’ and plants’ 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. For more information see page 7.

**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 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.facebook.com/ParksandWildlifeNT](http://www.facebook.com/ParksandWildlifeNT)
- Simpsons Gap Visitor Fact sheet
Learn and Discover

There are many different resources and supporting materials available to enhance your Simpsons Gap visit. 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 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 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 by doing your own research.

*Black-footed Rock-wallaby, Stimsons Python, Marbled velvet Gecko, Centralian Carpet Python, Desert Tree Frog, Mistletoe Bird, Centralian Tree Frog (pictured)*

“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. Simpsons Gap supports several of these habitats; learn more about these and discover the different plant species within them.

*Spinifex, Calitris (native pine), Mulga, Witchetty Bush (pictured), 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

Geology
The Gap itself is one of the most prominent of the region. Heavitree 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. 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
The name ‘Simons 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.

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 bird watch 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

**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 illustrated 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**, head off on sections 1 or 2 of this 223 km trail from Simpsons Gap. Walkers must be well prepared. For more information on the Larapinta Trail especially information for school groups visit the [Trail web page](https://nt.gov.au/nature/parks-reserves/activities-parks-community-events).

Guided Talks

Ranger guided talks and walks are conducted from May to August. Visit [https://nt.gov.au/nature/parks-reserves/activities-parks-community-events](https://nt.gov.au/nature/parks-reserves/activities-parks-community-events) 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 Simpsons Gap Ranger Station on (08) 8955 0310.

Nearby locations

Tie in a visit to one of these nearby locations to get more out of your visit!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standley Chasm</td>
<td>A refuge for many threatened plant and animal species, entry fees apply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen Springs Reserve</td>
<td>The site of the first Station Homestead in Central Australia, this Reserve is rich in European History.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ellery Creek Big Hole</td>
<td>A spectacular water hole with camping facilities and easy to see geology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs Telegraph Station</td>
<td>The site of the original town of Alice Springs (then known as Stuart), the well preserved buildings bring this era to life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Springs Desert Park</td>
<td>Learn more about the desert’s environments, animals and living culture.</td>
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Need Help? Or more information? Contact the Alice Springs Community Engagement Officer on (08) 8951 8247 OR the Simpsons Gap Rangers on (08) 8955 0310
We may be able to contribute ideas towards enhancing your excursion program.