

Barron Gorge National Park



Rugged mountain scenery, magnificent rainforests, rich and varied wildlife, a fascinating past and easy access make Barron Gorge National Park the most popular gateway to the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

Visitors can enjoy the park from the comfort of a train carriage, from an aerial cableway or by walking along the pack and dray routes of early pioneers or the traditional pathways of the Djabugay people.

Djina: La Galing — Going on foot

Long before the first white settlers arrived, the Djabugay people lived and hunted here. The gorge lies along a traditional pathway between Kuranda and the coast.

Barron Falls is a sacred site. Many Bama (Aboriginal people) believe that Gudju Gudju, the rainbow serpent, came ashore one day in the form of Buda:dji, the carpet snake, bringing nautilus shells from the coast to trade for dillybags on the Tableland. Buda:dji created much of the landscape in his travels. His death at the hands of emu men at Din Din (Barron Falls) unleashed the wet season's power. The Falls' former grandeur is rarely seen.

A colourful past

Gold lured the first white settlers to north Queensland. In the 1870s, the port of Cairns was established to service hinterland gold and tin mines. The Smith's and Douglas Tracks, the first overland supply routes, passed through the present-day park.

Miners also fossicked in the Barron Gorge area. Evidence of early mining can still be found in the park.

During the 1880s, attention turned to 'red gold' — red cedar trees. Logs cut on the Tableland were floated down the Barron River to the coast.

Because supply routes were often impassable after heavy rains, Tableland settlers lobbied for an all-weather transport route. In 1882, the government decided to build a railway line linking Herberton and the coast. Construction of the Redlynch to Myola (near Kuranda) section began in 1887.

Building the Barron Valley rail route through rugged country and dense rainforest proved a formidable undertaking. From 1887 until 1891, up to 1500 men built 24km of track, mostly by hand. The Queensland heritage-listed Redlynch–Kuranda line rises 320m and has 15 tunnels, 98 curves and more than 40 bridges.

The power of water flowing over Barron Falls was first harnessed in 1935 when the Barron Falls hydro-electric station, Australia's first underground power station, was built. The later construction of Tinaroo Dam, a weir at Kuranda and a larger hydro-electric power station reduced the Falls to a mere trickle, except in flood-time.

The national park, established in 1940, today covers 2820ha.

The scenic Cairns–Kuranda railway line still carries tens of thousands of passengers through the park each year. The Skyrail cableway was built through the park in 1995.

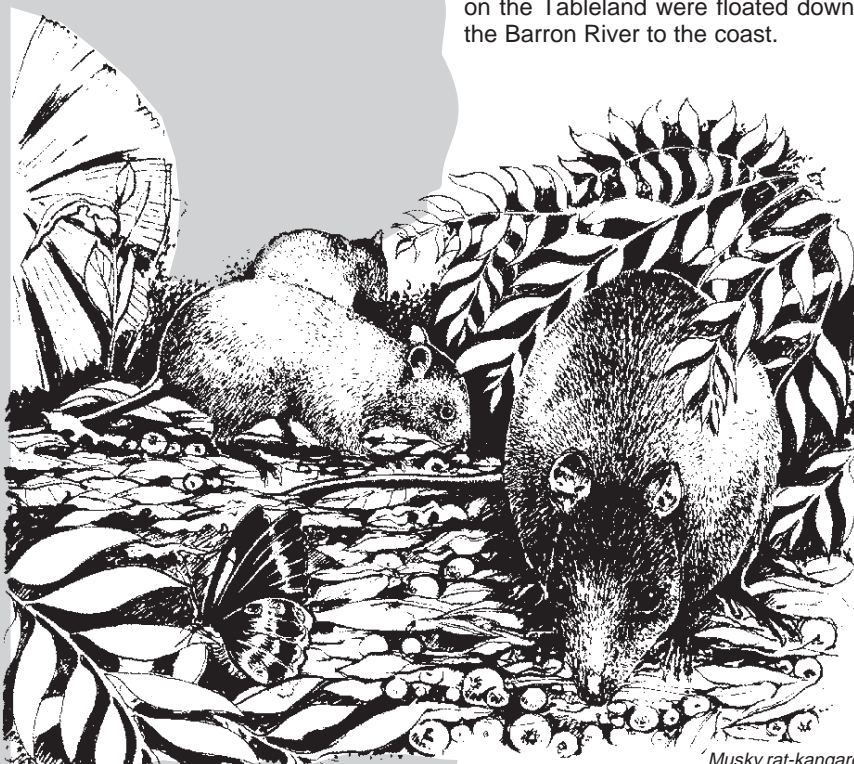
Natural wonders

The park is a key place to enjoy and experience the special values of the Wet Tropics World Heritage Area.

The Barron River plunges 250m into the gorge before it reaches the sea just north of Cairns. The spectacular, deeply-incised gorge is the product of 400 million years of geological uplift, compression and erosion.

Nine vegetation communities from lush tropical rainforests to mountain heath grow across altitudes ranging from sea level to the Tableland.

The park is a natural corridor for wildlife linking the northern and southern reaches of the Wet Tropics. Possums, tree-kangaroos, flying-foxes and spotted-tailed quolls are some of the mammals which use this corridor. Migratory fruit doves flock to the park in summer to feed on fruits.



Musky rat-kangaroo

Colourful butterflies such as the Cairns birdwing and the azure blue Ulysses are seen on sunlit track edges. The tiny musky rat-kangaroo, active by day, scatters rainforest fruits and seeds, helping the rainforest to regenerate. The southern cassowary makes a low booming sound as it struts through the forest. This large flightless bird standing up to 2m has a colourful neck wattle reflecting the colours of ripe rainforest fruits.

Frogs, snakes, lizards and skinks are plentiful. The amethystine python, Australia's longest snake growing up to 8m, stalks its prey by night and kills by squeezing and suffocation.

Although disturbed by past human activity, Barron Gorge National Park is still largely intact and can provide the visitor with many enjoyable recreational experiences.

Walking

While most of the park's visitors pass through by train or Skyrail, the best way to appreciate the park's special values is by walking.

Tracks are being re-opened and historic routes and management trails upgraded.

Smith's and Douglas Tracks

These historic overland routes between Speewah and Kamerunga are being upgraded for walkers.

Stony Creek Weir track

At the end of Stony Creek Road through the Cairns Rainforest Estate, this track passes through lowland vineforest to cascades on Stony Creek.

Surprise Creek track

This track is closed temporarily for safety reasons.

Barron Falls Lookout

A short walk (150m one-way) leads to two lookouts over the falls and gorge. The first part of the track is suitable for wheelchairs. The lookout has a colourful mural of the park's wildlife and the Djabugay story of Barron Falls.

Local weather

You can visit the park all year round but summers can be hot and wet. Winters (May to September) are mild and usually fine but nights can be cool.

Getting there

From Kuranda, take the sealed Barron Falls Road and drive 2km to the Barron Falls Lookout track.

The power station is 22km north-west of Cairns on the Barron Gorge Road.

The Skyrail Rainforest Cableway operates daily between Caravonica Lakes, just 14km from Cairns, and Kuranda. Call (07) 4038 1555.

The Cairns–Kuranda scenic railway operates daily between Cairns and Freshwater Stations and Kuranda. Call (07) 4041 2295.

Caring for the park

Help care for the park by observing these simple rules:

- Avoid disturbing wildlife. Protect plants, animals and all natural and cultural features.
- Leave your pets at home.
- Do not light open fires.
- Remove all rubbish.
- Remember fishing is not allowed.

Caring for yourself

Take some simple precautions to ensure a safe, enjoyable visit:

- Be careful walking. Walking along or below the railway line is dangerous. Stay on the walking tracks.
- Do not walk along the Gorge edge or on tracks which have been closed.
- When hiking in the park, carry fresh water, food and rain gear.
- Never touch the large heart-shaped leaves of the stinging tree. The painful sting lingers.
- Beware of cassowaries. Never get too close. Back away slowly, holding a backpack or other item at arm's length between you and the bird.
- Be careful. Wildfires can occur.
- Stay clear of feral pigs; they can be dangerous if provoked.

Managing the park

Work is under way to upgrade visitor facilities. This will make the park a showcase for the Wet Tropics. Check with the Ranger for progress on track upgrades.

This is the traditional country of the Djabugay people. Local Aboriginal people are involved closely in management.

For further information, contact:

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