

Witjira National Park



Healthy Parks
Healthy People



of South Austral



Witjira National Park

In the driest region of Australia, the sight of countless thermal springs surrounded by lush greenery really does make Witjira National Park an oasis in the desert. It is astonishing to find these thriving habitats amidst endless sand dunes and stark gibber plains.

Witjira National Park is part of the traditional country of the Lower Southern Arrernte and Wangkangurru people and is of special cultural significance to members of these groups. The park contains a wide range of important cultural features and evidence of past occupation.

Witjira National Park is managed by the Witjira National Park Co-management Board under a Co-management Agreement between the Minister for Environment and Conservation and the Irrwanyere Aboriginal Corporation.

The need to protect and rehabilitate the 120 or so thermal springs in the Dalhousie complex was one of the main reasons for the establishment of Witjira National Park. The springs are home to unique species of fish such as the Dalhousie hardyhead and other rare aquatic life. They are also a haven for birdlife, including three rare species.

Witjira National Park, established in 1985 on land comprising the former Mount Dare pastoral lease, covers 7,688 square kilometres of gibber, sand dunes, stony tablelands and floodplain country on the western edge of the Simpson Desert in the far north of South Australia. It is spectacular country with vast landscapes including many areas of considerable archaeological, biological and geological value. For this reason, the Witjira Dalhousie Springs were National Heritage Listed in 2009.

Today, the attraction of the Dalhousie mound springs, combined with some delightful camping spots and quality visitor facilities, make Witjira one of the outback's most popular parks, particularly with family groups.

Heritage

Aboriginal culture and heritage

For thousands of years before Europeans discovered them, Dalhousie Springs (known as Irrwanyere) provided water, shelter, food and medicines to the Aboriginal people of the desert. The ancient springs also have a strong mythological significance for Aboriginal people and are featured in many tribal stories and songs. There are extensive Aboriginal cultural and heritage sites within the park – please treat these areas, as well as the springs themselves, with the respect they deserve.

Exploration and pastoralism

Dalhousie Springs served as a refuge and base camp for Simpson Desert crossings by early explorers, as well as today's many adventurous 4WD travellers.

Ned Bagot took up the first pastoral lease in the area in 1872, which later became part of the Mount Dare property. The Dalhousie Homestead, stockyards and outbuildings were constructed in the following decade. Pastoralism in the area began with sheep, but the focus shifted to cattle by the turn of the century. Although many bores were sunk on Mount Dare station, Dalhousie Springs remained vital for the survival of stock.

The land was not ideal for pastoralism. During the brief history of the industry, various leases were abandoned, particularly from the start of the 1900s until just prior to the First World War. Evidence of European settlement remains in the Dalhousie ruins area in the form of old stockyards and agricultural equipment.

More than a century of grazing by sheep and cattle ceased in 1985 with the declaration of Witjira National Park. Mount Dare Hotel now operates as a private enterprise and provides fuel, meals, supplies and accommodation for visitors.

The springs

Dalhousie Springs are part of a chain of mound springs extending along the outer rim of the Great Artesian Basin. The group comprises the greatest concentration of mound springs in Australia.

Dalhousie Main Springs, where the springs lie in a broad depression, remain the most popular. The artesian water, which wells up from considerable depth, is millions of years old. The water at Dalhousie Springs is at bathwater temperature (36°C), making it perfect for a relaxing soak, whereas the water at Purni Bore is a scalding 85°C at the bore head.

Before DENR purchased the Mount Dare pastoral lease, recreational use of the springs area was causing degradation. The area is being rehabilitated and revegetated, ensuring the conservation of the springs and the flora and fauna that rely on them.

Facilities

The quality camping and visitor facilities at Dalhousie Springs provide a pleasant spot to set up camp. Facilities include showers, toilets and a day visitor parking area.

Camping is also available at Mount Dare, 3 O'Clock Creek and Purni Bore. Mount Dare has accommodation, food and drinks, hot showers, fuel, water and mechanical assistance. 3 O'Clock Creek bush camping area has drinking water, shady spots and firewood. Purni Bore is a pleasant camping spot with abundant birdlife, however visitors need to take their own drinking water and supplies. There is a hot shower, toilets and shade shelter. Firewood is not available.

Things to do

Visitors to the park can enjoy swimming in the warm tranquil waters of Dalhousie Main Spring, camping at the various campgrounds, bushwalking, exploring the historic heritage-listed Dalhousie Ruins, birdwatching and meeting other travellers at the Mount Dare Hotel.

If a ranger is in residence, feel free to approach them to find out more about the region.

Flora

Along many of the creeks in the park visitors can see red mulga, gidgee, coolibah and whitewood trees. Many of the shrubs in the park have quite colourful flowers and pods, such as the emubush, senna and honeysuckle grevillea. The dunes are typically home to mitchell grass and sandhill cane-grass. Thunderstorms result in a sea of colourful wildflowers that grow, flower, set seed and die, all within a few weeks.

Fauna

Dalhousie Springs is home to a number of endemic (found nowhere else in the world) species of fish, including the Dalhousie goby. The aquatic fauna of the thermal mound springs is of particular scientific interest. Over the ages, fish living in the springs have developed a tolerance to the variations in water temperature.

The springs are a haven for birdlife, including waterfowl, raptors (birds of prey), ducks, cormorants, grebes, stilts and egrets, as well as a variety of smaller woodland and shrubland species.

The park supports three rare bird species – the Australian bustard, the flock bronzewing and the plains-wanderer.

Native mammals are generally rare or not easily seen. The exceptions are dingoes, often observed out hunting, and the occasional red kangaroo. Most of the mammals you are likely to come across are actually introduced species, such as camels and rabbits.

Reptiles are a significant part of the park fauna, although most are small and hard to see. Two species you may see while travelling are the central bearded dragon and Gould's sand goanna. Snakes are seldom encountered; however, the region is home to the world's most venomous snake, the inland taipan.

Be Dingo safe

To keep dingoes wild and ensure your safety, please:

- Securely store rubbish, food, shoes and leather items.
- Never feed dingoes - they are naturally lean animals.
- Always stay with your children.
- Never encourage, excite or run away from dingoes.
- If attacked aggressively, defend yourself.



Dingo
Canis lupus dingo

Desert Parks Pass

A Desert Parks Pass or pre-purchased short-term entry and camping permit is required to enter and camp in Witjira National Park. A Desert Parks Pass is also required for access and camping in other Desert Parks including:

- Simpson Desert Conservation Park
- Simpson Desert Regional Reserve
- Lake Eyre National Park
(short-term entry permits also available)
- Innamincka Regional Reserve
(short-term entry and overnight camping permits also available)
- Coongie Lakes National Park
(short-term entry and overnight camping permits also available)
- Wabma Kadarbu Conservation Park
(camping not permitted)
- Tallaringa Conservation Park

The Desert Parks Pass is valid for 12 months and is issued on a per vehicle basis. It includes the maps required to visit this area, information on the parks, and requirements for safe travel through the outback of South Australia.

Camping permits for Witjira National Park are available from Oodnadatta and Mount Dare Hotel. Fees collected are used for conservation and to maintain and improve park facilities for your ongoing enjoyment.

A Desert Parks Pass is required for access east of Dalhousie Springs.



Central bearded dragon
Pogona vitticeps

Outback safety

The outback of South Australia is a vast, wonderful and rewarding place to visit. To ensure that you get the best out of your experience it is important to obtain good advice and thoroughly prepare for your journey.

The Desert Parks Pass contains detailed safety instructions, outback driving advice, vehicle and supply checklists as well as detailed maps for extended travel throughout Australia's unforgiving outback.

For shorter trips, pick up a *Remote Area Travel Information* brochure from Desert Parks Pass stockists. You can also download the brochure from www.parks.sa.gov.au or free call the Desert Parks Hotline on 1800 816 078 to find out more.

Minimal impact

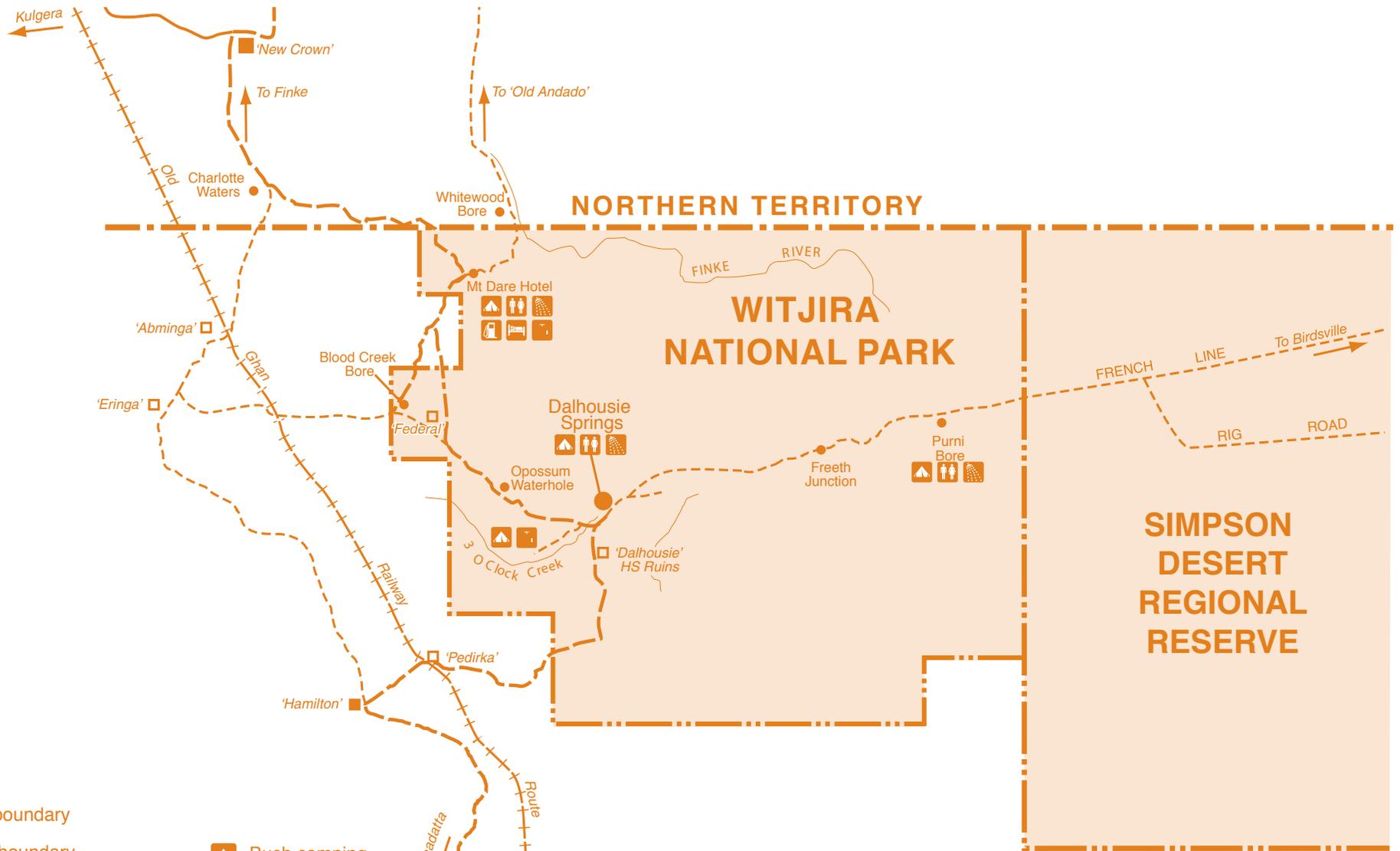
- Do not enter Aboriginal sites or living areas.
- Avoid washing close to water supplies, as even a small amount of soap or detergent will cause pollution. Don't use soap or detergents in the springs.
- Use toilet facilities where possible. Bury toilet waste well away from water and burn toilet paper.
- Bag and carry out all rubbish, including tyres, tubes and car batteries. Disposal facilities are located 3 km east and west of Dalhousie Springs.

Driving safety

- Carry adequate supplies of fuel, food and water in case of stranding.
- Use only Public Access Routes and designated camping areas.

- Prior to your journey, make sure your vehicle is in good condition and you have sufficient spare parts to cover most contingencies.
- Many park roads in Witjira National Park are 4WD accessible only and require a vehicle with high ground clearance.
- We recommend you carry a Satellite Phone or an HF Radio. Normal mobiles do not work in most outback areas. It is also a good idea to carry an EPIRB.
- You are responsible for your own safety. Notify a responsible person of your itinerary and expected date/time of return.
- Do not leave your vehicle in the event of a breakdown.
- Check the conditions of outback roads before leaving the nearest major town.
- Note where petrol stations are en route and their hours of operation.
- Take frequent rest breaks and change drivers regularly.
- Obey road closure signs and remain on main roads. Substantial fines apply for travelling on closed roads. Deviating can create tyre marks that last for decades.
- Avoid driving on salt lakes, as the seemingly hard surface can often hide soft mud underneath which is easy to get stuck in, yet hard to get out of.
- Be aware that you are travelling in very remote areas and traffic is sparse.

Up to date road conditions can be checked via the Far Northern and Western Areas road report - phone 1300 361 033 or visit www.transport.sa.gov.au/quicklinks/northern_roads/northern.asp. Alternatively, free call the Desert Parks Hotline on 1800 816 078.



- Park boundary
- State boundary
- Minor unsealed road
- 4WD track
- Abandoned railroad track
- Watercourse
- Homestead
- Ruin
- Bush camping
- Toilets
- Showers
- Accommodation
- Water
- Fuel
- Desert Parks Pass required



Fire safety

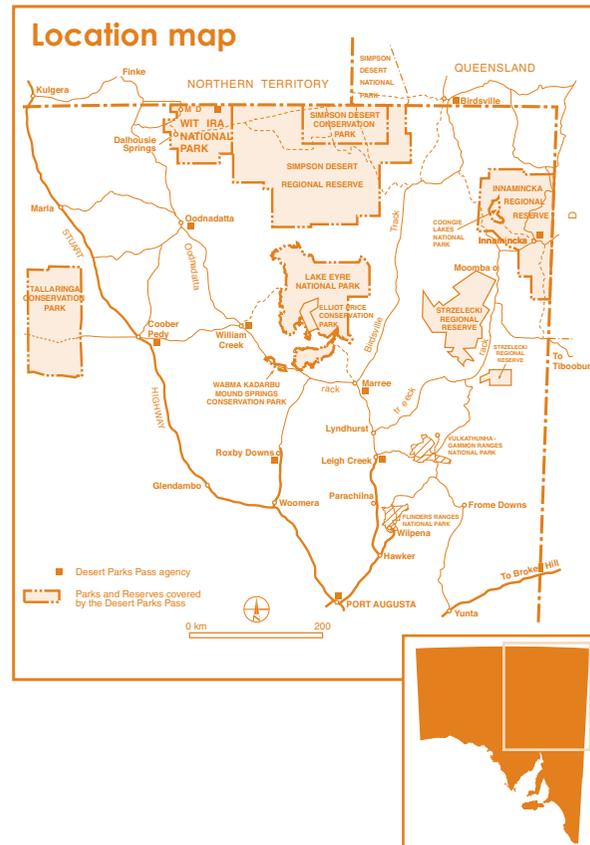
- Wood fires are not permitted in the park during the Fire Danger Season. Please use liquid fuel or gas stoves only. Further restrictions apply in some parks – check restrictions by calling the CFS hotline 1300 362 361.
- On Total Fire Ban Days, all fires (liquid, gas and wood) are prohibited in the park.
- Please do not collect firewood (except in designated areas) as fallen timber provides refuge for small animals. It is preferable you use a liquid fuel or gas stove.

The National Parks Code

Help protect your national parks by following these guidelines:

- Leave your pets at home.
- Take your rubbish with you.
- Observe fire restrictions, usually 1 November to 30 April. Check CFS hotline 1300 362 361.
- Conserve native habitat by using liquid fuel or gas stoves.
- Camp only in designated areas.
- Respect geological and heritage sites.
- Keep our wildlife wild. Do not feed or disturb animals, or remove native plants.
- Keep to defined vehicle tracks and walking trails.
- Be considerate of other park users.
- Firearms and hunting are not permitted.

Thank you for leaving the bush in its natural state for the enjoyment of others.



For further information contact:

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Phone (08) 8648 5300 Fax (08) 8648 5301
Website www.parks.sa.gov.au

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