



RUBY GAP NATURE PARK

JOINT MANAGEMENT PLAN
MARCH 2021



WORKING TOGETHER TO PROTECT CULTURE AND COUNTRY

"It's a special place."

The Traditional Owners and the Northern Territory Government present the Joint Management Plan for Ruby Gap Nature Park. As Joint Management Partners, we have developed this Plan with support and advice from the Central Land Council and other community members including tourism industry representatives. The Plan defines our shared vision, objectives and strategies to deliver effective joint management, healthy culture and country and high quality visitor experiences.

The assistance of the Central Land Council in facilitating this Plan with Traditional Owners is gratefully acknowledged.

This Plan has been prepared consistent with section 25AD of the *Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1976* (TPWC Act). It supersedes the 1991 Plan of Management for Ruby Gap Nature Park and will remain in effect until it is amended or replaced by a new Plan.

This marker indicates words spoken by Traditional Owners throughout this document

Cover: Ruby Gap Nature Park

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VISION STATEMENT OF THE JOINT MANAGEMENT PARTNERS

“Ahirre-areme (Looking ahead).”

Traditional Owners and Park staff work together to share knowledge and learn from each other. This keeps Ruby Gap’s spirit strong for all families, Park staff, visitors and country.

PARK SIGNIFICANCE AND VALUES

“Ruby Gap is a place for peaceful feelings.”

Ruby Gap Nature Park (9,257 hectares) is located in the East MacDonnell Ranges, 150km east of Alice Springs (Figure 1). It is a wild and remote place that offers spectacular scenery for the more adventurous visitor.

In comparison with some of the other parks in Central Australia, Ruby Gap offers a unique and genuine bush adventure, based on challenging four-wheel driving and the need for visitors to be self-sufficient.

The Park is characterised by rugged hills, escarpments and gorges, much of which was shaped by the broad Hale River (*Arletherre*). The River winds through the north western part of the Park, which over time, has carved the dramatic gorges of Ruby Gap and Glen Annie. Minor tributaries off the main river valley have worn narrow, deeply incised gorges.

The Hale River (*Arletherre*) is the largest river in the East MacDonnell Ranges, extending some 80km upstream from the Park. Although usually dry and sandy, it is susceptible to flash flooding, that can occur without rain falling in the immediate area. The remote eastern section of the Park consists of lower, rolling and broken hills.

The Park is set within the internationally significant MacDonnell Ranges Bioregion. It contains plants and animals of conservation significance, that are well represented within the Parks estate. The sheltered gorges contain waterholes and provide a refuge for many native animals including waterbirds.

Ruby Gap is the site of the first mining rush in Central Australia. Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye* people provided invaluable assistance to the early miners and are part of the region’s shared mining history and heritage. The Park contains one known historic site; a memorial headstone to a miner named Fox, which is situated in the far north of the Park.

Our Story - The Traditional Owners of Ruby Gap Nature Park

**“Before the outstations,
I lived at Ruby Gap.”**

“*Tyweltherreme* is the ancient name of Ruby Gap as called by the Eastern Arrernte people. Eastern Arrernte people believe in the *Altyerre* or creation where All came into existence.”

Tyweltherreme lies in country of the Eastern Arrernte, the dialect called *Ikngerre-iperre*, which translates to “from the east” and falls within the estate known as *Ulpmerre*. Traditional Owners of *Tyweltherreme* identify themselves as *Ulpmerre arenye*, and belong to the land through a system of laws and customs that have been inherited from the *Altyerre* (the Dreaming), and handed down through the generations. People may be *Apmereke-artweye* (“bosses”) or *Kwetengwerle* (“managers”) depending on the inheritance of country through paternal or maternal lineage. Responsibility for country is a shared partnership between *Apmereke-artweye* and *Kwetengwerle*.

The laws and customs of *Altyerre* - Dreamtime stories and songs are observed, enlivened and maintained through the generations. The details in these stories guide Arrernte people in their behaviours and relationships with each other, the environment and the spirit realm.

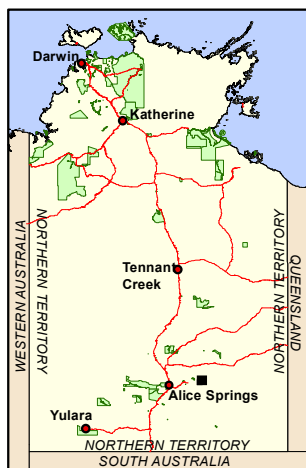
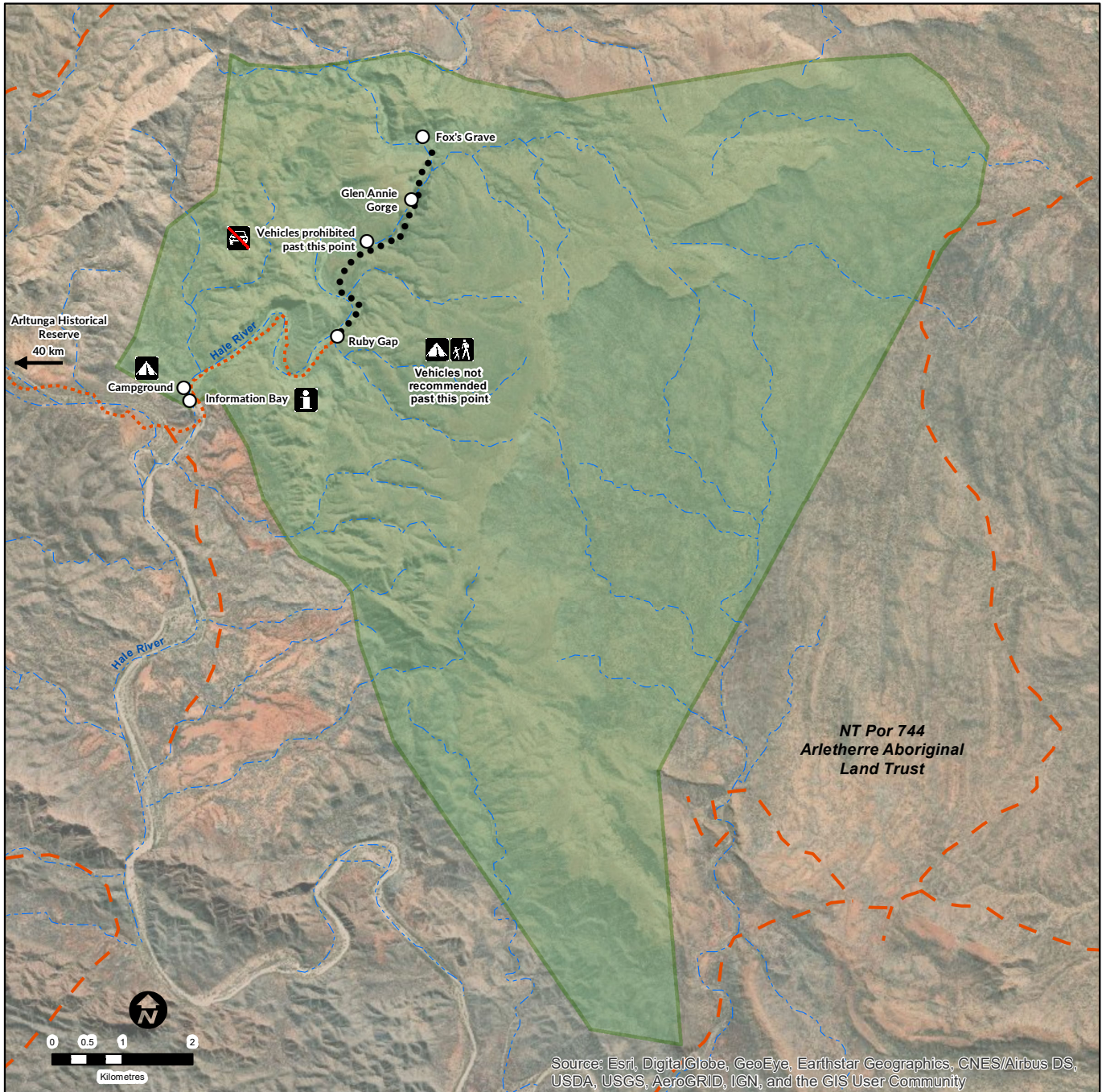
To Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye*, the landscape was created by the travels, actions and encounters of their ancestors. The details of these activities are recorded in the stories and songs of Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye*. These ancestors created everything in the landscape. They created the features of the land, the sacred sites, animals and plants, and they created the boundaries and areas between ‘countries’ or ‘estates’. These areas are often associated with a group of landowners or Traditional Owners. These groups are linked to each other and the landscape through kinship affinity, spiritual connection and acquisition of knowledge of the *Altyerre*.

Shared History

The Hale River (*Arletherre*) was once an important travelling route to the Simpson Desert for Aboriginal people. The district was first visited by European explorers and settlers in the late 1870s, followed by the first mining rush due to the misidentified rubies (garnets) that had been found at Ruby Gap in the mid-late 1880s. Although this rush was short-lived, it sparked an interest in the mineral resources of the area. Ultimately, the influx of miners and others to the district led to the establishment of the township of Stuart, now known as Alice Springs.

Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye* assisted the ruby miners (and later, miners on the Arltunga and Winnecke gold fields), acting as guides, trackers, sorters of gemstones, and providing domestic services. The gemstone sorting work required local Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye* to distinguish the high quality stones from the inferior class of gemstones. Much of this work fell to Aboriginal women, as digging was traditionally regarded as women’s work in Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye* culture.

Most of the historic mining activity occurred north of the Park, however Ruby Gap Springs was a water source for early prospectors and for Loves Creek Station. This early history is of interest to visitors and the historical connections between events at Ruby Gap and Arltunga Historical Reserve provides opportunities for a holistic interpretation of the district’s mining heritage, including the contribution of the local Aboriginal population to the development of Central Australia’s early mining industry. The nature of this early mining activity combined with natural events, such as periodic flooding of the Hale River (*Arletherre*), means that few physical remains have survived. To date, the only tangible link relating to these early mining activities in and around the Park is the memorial headstone for a miner named Fox and the purple garnet sands.



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DATA SOURCE:
 Cadastral, Topographic, Road Centreline data sourced from Information Services Section, Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics

Legend

- Campground
- Information
- Short Walks
- Walking Track
- 4WD Track
- Unsealed Road
- Cadastral
- Ruby Gap Nature Park

THEME 1: MAKING JOINT MANAGEMENT WORK

Principles for making joint management work:

- Respecting Traditional Owner's rights to continue caring for Country keeps their culture strong.
- Engagement of Traditional Owners in management operations is central to successful joint management.
- Decision-making and accountability should be equally shared and Aboriginal decision-making processes must be respected.
- Good decisions can only be made when both partners have a clear process and guidelines, good information and enough time to consider decisions properly.
- Time spent together on Country is important for developing mutual trust, respect and understanding between the Joint Management Partners and of each other's roles.
- Resources are limited and must be efficiently used. Management priorities will be guided by the Joint Management Partners' key values.
- Risks to successful joint management are identified and actions are put in place to minimise them.
- Joint management has to be checked to see that it is working well. It is important to keep improving.
- Public support for joint management is very important.

The terms of joint management for the Park have authority in law under the TPWC Act and an Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) registered under the *Native Title Act 1993*. This Plan complies with these legal instruments. Ruby Gap Nature Park is held by the Conservation Land Corporation.

Joint management is about Traditional Owners and Northern Territory Government looking after Ruby Gap Nature Park together.

If the partnership is working well, outcomes will include equitable and efficient decision-making leading to healthy culture and Country, visitors continuing to have safe and enjoyable experiences and the broader community being supportive. Joint management also contributes toward economic, social and wellbeing benefits for Traditional Owners and their families.

"Traditional Owners don't own the country - we are part of the country."

The TPWC Act defines the Joint Management Partners as the traditional Aboriginal Owners of the Park and the Territory. For the purposes of this Joint Management Plan, references to the Northern Territory Government as a joint management partner should be read as a reference to the Territory. The TPWC Act further defines the objective to jointly establish an equitable partnership to manage and maintain the Park as part of a comprehensive and representative system of parks and reserves in the Territory for the following purposes:

1. Benefiting both the Traditional Owners and the wider community
2. Protecting biological diversity
3. Serving visitor and community needs for education and enjoyment.

The TPWC Act also establishes the requirements of joint management plans and the role of the Central Land Council (CLC) in assisting joint management by representing and protecting the interests of the Traditional Owners.

The Joint Management Committee

The joint management plans for Ruby Gap and the Arltunga Historical Reserve will operate under one Joint Management Committee. The Committee will consist of at least four members from each of the two Traditional Owner family groups, two male and two female and at least two Senior Government Officers.

The Partners recognise that joint management is a learning process, requiring an adaptive approach that respects the principles of making joint management work.

The Joint Management Partners will meet at least once a year to discuss management of the Park and the Reserve, preferably on Country.

The annual work program, any new proposals, reporting from Parks staff and how well joint management is working will be discussed at these meetings.

Park staff will manage the day to day operations and maximise on-ground participation of Traditional Owners in the management of the Park.

The role of the Partners is to develop a sensible protocol for determining permits, considering work programs and taking advice from the wider Traditional Owner group. The Committee members will pass on information from meetings to their families and give feedback to Park staff.

Objective and Strategies

A strong and equitable partnership through effective governance.

- The Ruby Gap / Arltunga Joint Management Committee will adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to Park management.
- Meetings on Country and dedicated Country camps will be held to provide the opportunity for the Joint Management Partners to visit and discuss issues.
- Clear roles will be determined by the Partners to give them the tools and skills to work effectively in the partnership.
- Cross-cultural training for staff will be encouraged.
- Any future proposals will be openly considered by the Partners.
- Traditional Owner aspirations for economic development and employment through Park management and tourism enterprise will be supported.
- Consideration will be given to renaming the Park in consultation with Traditional Owners, subject to Commonwealth and Northern Territory legislation.



THEME 2: LOOKING AFTER COUNTRY AND CULTURE

"We are all caretakers of this land, we want to teach our young people."

Principle for looking after Country and culture.

- Managing Country means working on Country and managing natural and cultural values together.

Ruby Gap is an important place not only for the natural values, but also for respecting, practicing and continuing culture. When making decisions on looking after Country and culture, the Joint Management Partners need to consider:

Traditional Law

The Park is a vital part of Eastern Arrernte / *Ulpmerre arenye* law and culture, and maintaining connections to Country and the passing on of inter-generational knowledge is essential. Under traditional law the Traditional Owners are responsible for Country and are obliged to protect it from physical and spiritual harm. This requires people to respect the land and its spirits, the guardians of the land. The landscape may not be interfered with or damaged, as this disturbs the Law and spirits that dwell on, or in the land. Law is reciprocal and looking after Country will in turn keep people healthy and culture strong.

Traditional use

For Traditional Owners, looking after Country involves visiting and watching it, moving appropriately on it and protecting it from damage. Knowledge is shared about the land and special places, including how to use the Country's resources in culturally appropriate ways.

Merne Pwetye - arenye - Culturally significant bush tucker species

There are many plant species that are collected by Traditional Owners in and around Ruby Gap. These include the following:

- Alangkwe - Bush Banana
- Ngkwerrpme - Mistletoe Berry
- Arrkirlpangkwerle - Bush Coconut



Alangkwe - Bush Banana (*Marsdenia australis*)
"if you eat too much little ones you get a sore tongue, even the leaves can be eaten. Don't eat too many flowers or you get a tummy ache" - Traditional Owner



Bush Honey - Ngkwarle - "we really like that one it's sweet" Traditional Owner

- Yalke - Bush Onion
- Ingkwerlpe - Bush Tobacco
- Urltampe / Arwengalkere – Sugarbag / wild honey
- Arrutnenge - Wild Passionfruit
- Atwakeye - Native Orange
- Utyerrke - Wild Fig
- Arne urrkng - Sap from any tree
- Ngkwarle - Bush Honey
- Awerre - awerre - Green leaf plant with a yellow flower
- Awerreyapwere - Wild bean
- Pintye-pintye - Bush with a purple flower
- Aperaltye - lolly from underneath gum tree leaves.

Kere Merne Pwetye - arenye - Meat bush tucker and other animals

There are also many animal species that are collected by Traditional Owners. These include:

- Arrwe - Black-footed Rock Wallaby. “lives on the hills. Good to eat, old people used to eat them. You got to think of them as nowadays got to be careful - must be endangered.”
- Aherre (red one), urite (girl - blue one) Red Kangaroo

- Arenge - Euro - “if you got sharp teeth you can have a go at it. You cook them on the coals, burn the skin off and put ‘em in a pit of coals, cover up to cook.”
- Alewetyerre - Goanna - “this is meat as well. First round of thunder start seeing ‘em, they hibernating in winter.”
- Tyape - Witchetty Grubs.
- Ankerte - Bearded Dragon - “we love it and it’s good medicine, easy tucker to get.”
- Arripere - Brown Snake - “they are dangerous. When climbing the hills and picking up fire wood you have to be alert.”
- Antenhe - Possum - “got to look for claw marks on the trees. Lives on the gum trees, they eat the leaves and flowers, they go back into the hollows and comes out at night, nocturnal one.”
- Artewe - Wild Turkey - similar to Arleye - Emu, “they walk around on the plains.”

Water resources

The Park contains many waterholes and rockholes, which provide refuges for the area’s plants and animals. Large valleys and sandy floodplains are an active part of the drainage system and are subject to flooding, erosion and sand deposition during major flooding.

*Bloodwood Apple tree is the host for a large round woody gall with an edible, cocount flavoured centre, know as the Bush Coconut - “it’s like a little cocoon inside, it’s yellow, it’s got the sweet stuff in it”.
Traditional Owner*



Plants

The Park contains ecologically important plant communities that support a diversity of other native plant and animal species including communities of *Acacia aneura* (Mulga), *Acacia macdonnellensis* (Hill Mulga) and five vine species that occur in the valleys and narrow gorges. *Macrozamia macdonnellii* (MacDonnell Ranges Cycad) which is listed vulnerable nationally under the *Environment Protection Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) is also found in the Park and represented regionally.

Species listed Near Threatened under the TPWC Act include *Austrostipa* (*Austrostipa centralis*) and (*Austrostipa feresetacea*), Eucalyptus, Thozet's Box - Napunyah, Yapunyah (*Eucalyptus thozetiana*), Euphorbia, False Caustic Bush, Climbing Caustic (*Euphorbia sarcostemmoides*), Parietaria (*Parietaria cardiostegia*), Pink Rock-wort (*Sedopsis filsonii*), Spartothamnella and Red-berried Stick-plant (*Teucrium disjunctum*).

Plants listed as Data Deficient include Variable Daisy (*Brachyscome ciliaris*), Desert Rattlepod (*Crotalaria eremaea subsp. eremaea*), Dysphania (*Dysphania pumilio*), Sida sp. Hale River and Violet Twinleaf (*Zygophyllum iodocarpum*). Limited surveys have been conducted on the Park and further investigations may detect more populations of significant species.

Animals

Habitats and native animals typical of the MacDonnell Ranges live within the Park. There are eight significant species listed as Vulnerable nationally and Near Threatened within the Northern Territory, including the Black-footed Rock Wallaby (*Petrogale lateralis*). Also listed as Near Threatened in the Northern Territory are Australian Reed-Warbler (*Acrocephalus australis*) and Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*). Data Deficient species under the EPBC Act include Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) and Centralian Blind Snake (*Anilius centralis*). Listed EPBC Act migratory species include Oriental Pratincole (*Glareola maldivarum*) and Rainbow Bee-eater (*Merops ornatus*).

Brush-tailed Possum (*Trichosurus vulpecula*) is endangered in the Northern Territory and it is believed that very few remain in Central Australia. There are no records for the species at Ruby Gap, however records exist for nearby sites. Feral cats and foxes are likely causes for their decline, however longer extreme hot weather events may have also impacted Central Australian populations.

Some uncommon, possibly at-risk species such as the Desert Mouse (*Pseudomys desertor*), Spinifexbird (*Eremiornis carteri*), Rufus-crowned Emu Wren (*Stipiturus ruficeps*) and Dusky Grasswren (*Amytornis purnelli*) inhabit the mature Spinifex communities in the Park. These areas are susceptible to fire. The sheltered environment of the Gorges provides a refuge for many other native animals such as Euros (*Macropus robustus*), Black-footed Rock Wallabies (*Petrogale lateralis*) and birds such as the Painted Firetail (*Emblema picta*) and Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrines*) as well as several species of waterbirds.

Protecting against threats

Large wildfires burned through the Park in 2007 and 2011. Fire plays a major part in shaping vegetation and in high rainfall years heavy fuel loads of Buffel Grass (*Cenchrus ciliaris*) and Couch Grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) can lead to destructive wildfires. These species are concentrated along the banks and floodplains of the Hale River where they have largely restricted the growth of native grasses.

Although there are no Weeds of National Significance in the Park, there are fourteen introduced plant species recorded. Introduced species are generally restricted to the bed and banks of the Hale River and other areas of concentrated visitor activity.

Introduced animals recorded in the Park include cattle, horses, donkeys, camels, feral cats and rabbits. The Park boundary is unfenced, but the rugged topography limits the intrusion of stock in many places. Nevertheless, there are several areas where cattle and horses can gain access to the Park, notably via the Hale River and its tributaries and creeks along the northern and southern boundaries. Floodgates and exclusion fencing manage the intrusion of stock from neighbouring country.

Existing areas of erosion along the Hale River are within the floodzone, primarily due to the impacts of vehicles and visitor activity. Vegetation cover, mainly grasses, prevents accelerated erosion in most of these areas.

Mining, mineral exploration and extraction activities may impact upon the recreational, natural and cultural values of the Park. Traditional Owners currently feel that mining is not consistent with the values of the Park and are unlikely to support such activities in the foreseeable future.

Objective and Strategies

The Park's natural and cultural values are protected and Aboriginal knowledge and interests are incorporated into management programs.

The Partners will learn about and share Aboriginal knowledge to continue looking after Country together.

- Cultural knowledge shared will always belong to the Traditional Owners and will only be used as directed by them, consistent with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Policy.
- Fire management in the Park will focus on strategic fuel reduction and fire breaks in the bush camping areas along the Hale River. Additionally, burning in the spinifex-dominated communities on the ranges will aim to maintain a diverse pattern of fire ages.
- Senior Traditional Owners will be consulted on the fire management program.
- Soil and gravel extraction for soil conservation or other purposes will be subject to the approval of the Partners.
- The Partners will work with the local community and relevant stakeholders to ensure a coordinated approach to land management across tenures and neighbouring properties.
- Fences and floodgates will be maintained to exclude feral animals from the river corridor in the North West of the Park and from the visitor section of the Hale River.



THEME 3: VISITOR EXPERIENCES

"We want visitors to have a safe visit and enjoy the beauty of Ruby Gap."

Principle for Visitor Experiences

- The undeveloped, wild and remote character of the Park is the key attraction for visitors.

For visitors looking for unspoiled nature, spectacular scenery, remote solitude and adventure, the Park offers one of the best experiences of its kind in Central Australia. As a side-trip to the Binns Track it is well located for those that enjoy genuine four-wheel driving and self-sufficient camping. The Park is undeveloped, with no facilities and minimal signage. There are no marked walking tracks and visitors are free to explore adventurously. There are currently no plans to develop vehicle access to or within the Park, nor to develop additional visitor facilities.

The East MacDonnell Ranges are a quieter, less developed alternative to the Red Centre Way and the parks west of Alice Springs. Ruby Gap's relatively challenging four-wheel drive access is central to the visitor experience. There is one public access track of 35km leading to the Park from Arltunga Historical Reserve. Keeping this track to an undeveloped, high clearance four-wheel drive standard is important for preserving the visitor experience. Visitor numbers are estimated at 1500 per year. Promotion of the Binns Track may see a modest increase in visitor numbers over time.

Glen Annie Gorge is the highlight of the Park. For most visitors it is a two-hour, four kilometer walk, from a point in the Hale River where most vehicles are impeded by rocky ridges to the Gorge entrance.

The Ruby Gap Nature Park experience is about enjoying the quiet, spectacular surrounds and exploring nature. Visitors enjoy bush camping, picnicking, bushwalking, photography, wildlife viewing and at certain times, swimming. Almost all visitor activity is concentrated within an 8km corridor of the Hale River, in the Park's north-west corner. The rest of the Park is inaccessible except by foot. While the Park is available for longer, more serious bushwalking it is not known for this activity.

The Traditional Owners of Ruby Gap and Arltunga Historical Reserve are the same group. The Traditional Owners would like to share with visitors stories of their cultural heritage and the historical connections between Ruby Gap and Arltunga. The relationships between the miners and local Eastern Arrernte / Ulpmerre arenye and their contribution to the development of Central Australia's early mining industry are of particular interest.

Visitor Safety

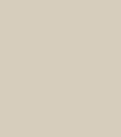
The remoteness of the area highlights the importance of visitors being well-informed and well-prepared to safely enjoy the Park. Risks include flash flooding of the Hale River and visitors becoming bogged or otherwise stranded. High summer temperatures can be especially dangerous for lost, injured or stranded visitors. Pre-visit safety information is provided through various online sites and at the Arltunga Historical Reserve Visitor Centre. It is essential that accurate Park access and other safety information is always accessible and emergency response procedures are maintained.

Objective and Strategies

Manage and maintain safe, sustainable and outstanding experiences.

- Maintain the Park as a low key four-wheel driving and bush camping attraction.
- Ensure that accurate Park access and other safety information is always accessible via online and other pre-visit media.
- Maintain emergency response procedures.
- Work with Tourism NT and the tourism industry so that accurate and appropriate messaging reflects the values of the Park and the wishes of Traditional Owners.
- Interpret for visitors the area's fascinating natural and cultural history, including stories from Traditional Owners using Arrernte language.
- Explore opportunities for Traditional Owners to engage in tourism related to the Park and surrounding areas.
- Fossicking is not permitted as the Park is Reserved Land (RL 1071) under the *Mineral Titles Act 2010*.





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