

THE BUNGLE BUNGLE RANGE

In the last newsletter I covered our trip along the Gibb River Road. After a taste of modern civilisation at Kunnarra we headed to the Bungle Bungle range located within the Purnululu National Park. In our report on the Gibb road, a map identifies the location of Bungles.



The Bungles were made famous via a 1982 documentary that introduced to the wider world the exotic landscape domes that are the Bungles. The spectacular nature of the landscape brought a horde of tourists and the West Australia and Federal Governments declared the area a national

park in 1987 to control access to the area. It is now a world heritage area.

Access to the Bungles is via a 73km dirt road off the main road to Fitzroy Crossing. A public campground is located near the turnoff but we stayed at the Belburn Safari Lodge located close to the range. Readers might be interested to know that the national park charges a daily entry fee of about A\$20 plus accommodation fees.

What people usually want to know is how the striped domes were formed.

The sandstone formation of the Bungle Bungle ranges is estimated to be 350 million years old, give or take a few millions. The range is the sediment of an old river bed. The sediment was laid down in layers, compressed into sandstone and eventually lifted up to form a mountain range. Originally it was all one big



block, with joints and weak areas as a result of the movement. Weathering caused more cracks and the edges wore away in the millions of years of torrential wet season rains, winds, combined with alternating winter freezes and 50 plus degree heat in summer.



The dark layers in the sediment/rock have a higher clay content and hold the moisture better. They support cyanobacteria (primitive organisms, previously called blue-grey algae). The bacteria only grow on the surface, a few millimetres into the rock. But that's enough to form a protective outer layer and prevent erosion. The lighter coloured layers have less clay, are more porous and dry out quickly. Cyanobacteria can't grow here and without the protective coat the surface is exposed to "rusting". Oxidisation of the

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[Piccaninny Creek](#)

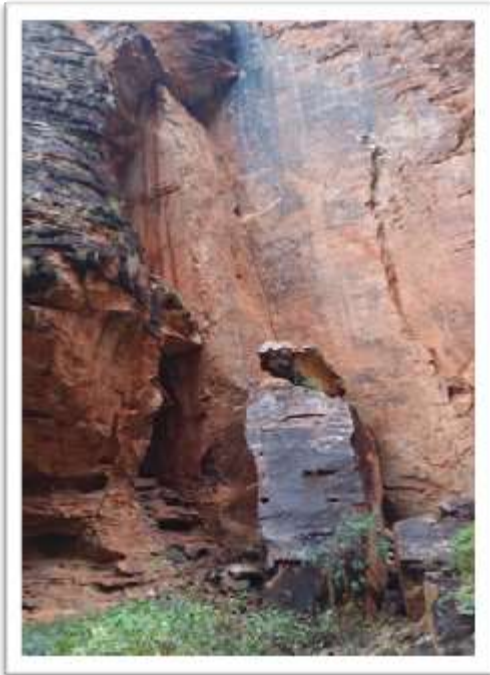
The sandstone is very soft and fragile. The raging waters of the wet seasons have washed out wide creeks and deep canyons, steep sided rifts and chasms, not to forget the astounding circular Cathedral Gorge, the result of a massive wet season whirl pool.

The Bungle Bungle name comes from a nearby station.

We were most unfortunate. Although it is the dry season it rained all night and low cloud next day prevented us taking a helicopter flight over the Bungles where one can appreciate



the unique characteristics of the geology and to view the sheer scale of it.



So it was a case of exploring the ranges close up. Most of the range is protected from human feet trampling through it. We walked Piccaninny Creek, the Dome, Cathedral Canyon and the Echidna chasm and it was a day in a different, magical world, on another planet, in another sphere. It's impossible to compare the Bungle Bungle Range to anything you know. It's difficult to describe and best displayed through photographs.

I'll try with descriptions. The effects of weathering and erosion when viewed close up reveal a peppered surface where the alternative layers are clearly identified. Because of the rain the darker bands look darker. The Cathedral Canyon

is massive and it is difficult to capture the sheer scale with a camera. Similarly, the Chasm is a mix of fault line and erosion. Walking through the narrow gaps and looking up doesn't provide the same scope as when viewed from the air. Sandra & I did this on an earlier visit.

The Chasm Cathedral Canyon

So we suggest you put a visit to the Bungles on your bucket list. If short of time you can take a flight from Kunnarra.

