



Located 650km northwest of Brisbane is the small and relatively unknown Lonesome section of Expedition National Park. It's easy to assume this section isn't worth a visit, especially with the world-famous Carnarvon Gorge about an hour north. But once you've got your boots on the ground, you'll discover that Lonesome is hiding some aces up its sleeve and is an amazing place to stay and explore.



Away from the crowds, Lonesome is well worth a visit.

With the uncertainty of travel restrictions and border closures, we decided not to venture too far from home or book somewhere too early. Carnarvon Gorge is on our bucket list but with camping in the National Park restricted to school holidays, bookings need to be made 12 months in advance. Our best alternative was to base camp at Lonesome which allowed for last-minute arrangements and meant we could explore both the area around our camp and take a day trip(s) into Carnarvon Gorge.



The road into Expedition National Park, Lonesome section.

Getting there

Getting to the campground is relatively straight-forward and is easy enough for a standard 4WD and an off-road caravan. Head north from Roma for about 1.5hrs, turn east for a short drive and then it's less than a 1km from the black top along a dirt track.



The campground is relatively small and surrounded by brigalow scrub and tall open forest.

The campground

Surrounded by brigalow scrub and towering open forest, the campground is relatively small but with the lack of popularity even during school holidays, it wasn't a problem.

With no facilities at the National Park, you need to be completely self-sufficient, bringing absolutely everything you need and taking it all out with you, especially your rubbish. Leave no trace! The area is clean and offers soft grass which makes it very agreeable for tents, swags or soft floor campers. There's ample room for the kids to run and play too, although next time we'll be sure to bring their bikes!



Playing at camp, there's loads of room for kids to run and ride their bikes.

Self-sufficiency

Along with enough food for a week, we took 160 litres of water to fully cater for our family of 4 – that includes drinking, washing and cooking. We also brought a chemical toilet with us and milled firewood which is a requirement of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Bringing your own milled wood is also much less disruptive to the surrounding natural environment.

As with any trip always carry a comprehensive first aid kit, fire extinguisher and let someone know your travel itinerary. While it's not difficult to access or get around the park, the lack of visitors and no phone reception means you cannot rely on others if something goes wrong.



This is where a satellite phone or satellite messenger device can offer some peace of mind.



This area is remote and you need to be completely self-sufficient.

Lonesome's secret aces

The Dawson River is a short walk from camp but given it is not a permanent water source and due to the extreme lack of rainfall, it was unfortunately completely dry during our stay. Towering above the campground is an ancient sandstone peak with a lookout that is accessible from the main road. The view into the valley and surrounding sandstone cliffs is spectacular and provides a little hint into the secrets held within this section.



The lookout atop an ancient sandstone peak offers stunning views.

Heading deeper into the scrub are numerous small tracks and as our GPS steered us down one, we came across an awesome rock formation that the kids dubbed the “monkeys scratching rocks”. Officially known as The Candlesticks, this natural formation completely blew us away and was a real gem to stumble across. It's great to appreciate a site like this without swarms of people, but it is a pity for it not to be acknowledged with signage or more detailed information at the campsite. We've spoken with other travellers who have visited the area, and they were unfamiliar with The Candlesticks and had no idea such a gem was hidden in this section!



The Candlesticks are relatively unknown but well worth seeking out when exploring the Lonesome section.

This track continues beyond The Candlesticks, becoming even more remote and turning into terrain best suited for a 4WD. It climbs further up into the hills with steep drop-offs either side and invites a slow journey with even more ancient stone formations to stop and investigate. While not difficult it is steep and narrow and best managed in low range, but with good views into the valley below, it was definitely worth the drive.



The track begins gently and then becomes steep as it climbs up into the hills.

A nod to the past

Returning to the main track where the sandstone cliffs continue to induce wonder and awe, it was fun to explore more of the smaller tracks forking in other directions and one such track unearthed an old hut which looked to be nearly 100-years-old. Inside it showcased a life from a bygone era with an old wood stove, ice boxes and even a small cupboard housing some vintage staples. With no information to tell us otherwise, we assume it was once used as a Drover's hut when there was a cattle station in the area, but the fact that nothing was vandalised or stolen is a true testament to the secrecy of this place.



Furnishings from yesteryear when the now historical hut was possibly used for a drover's hut.



When to visit

Our stay was during the middle of winter and the nights were freezing! If you plan a visit during the cooler months, make sure your sleeping setup is adequate – bring insulated mats, rated sleeping bags with a decent R-value, warm clothes plus a thermal base layer, and hot water bottles. [This blog post](#) offers some great tips on how to keep warmer at night when camping during winter.

Despite the cold nights, the days were glorious and made a rest day lazing about camp very enjoyable. During the summer months, the park would be hot, dry and not very appealing. The amount of water you would need to bring would be greatly increased, as would the risk of [snakes](#) and bushfires.



The sunny winter days were perfect.

Day trips

With Carnarvon Gorge an hour's drive north we made a day trip to see what all the fuss was about. While the walks reward with fantastic natural rock formations, the long distances are less than ideal for young kids. Lonesome park spoiled us with solitude and in contrast, the Gorge felt cramped and a little too busy. It made us appreciate our quiet, private camp and after spending the day north, we were eager to get back and marvel as another amazing night sky revealed itself.



There is no light pollution interfering with these skies after dark.

Wildlife and safety

As with any remote area in Australia, respect and awareness are paramount. It pays to be conscious of snakes, spiders and other [things that bite](#) and while we didn't see any in the area during our stay, regardless of the season, we always teach our kids not to leave clothing and shoes on the ground outside the tent.

With no other campers to scare off the wildlife, we spotted plenty of roos, a couple of hawks and heard a few possums at night. We also identified the sound of dingo pups in the distance, excitedly howling when their mother no doubt returned after a night of hunting and scavenging.



There were no other campers around and we loved exploring and seeing the rock formations up close.

Worth it

I know it may be a cliché to say that Lonesome felt like taking a step back in time, but it really did. Not back to the time of dinosaurs, no, but it felt like it could have been at least 30 to 40 years ago to a time before technology took hold.





A perfect place to step back, unplug and get away from it all.

Lonesome is probably what most of the national parks used to be like before camping got as popular and comfortable as it is now. There are no people, services and very little information available. But it's quiet, you can explore and discover things for yourself, and you might just find even more hidden gems.

We completely underestimated Lonesome, but what an unexpected treat it turned out to be. Our trip was a good reminder to get out there, explore and create new experiences for yourself.

Have you stumbled across any hidden secrets in nature lately?