



The stepping stones were just visible in the fading light. We made it across the last 500m to arrive at the car in the dark. What a day! Beautiful sunshine, refreshing rain, awesome scenery and the satisfaction of completing 25km of walking. This was the masochistic way of exploring the amazing Carnarvon Gorge. It can be completed in far easier ways but the circumstances for us at this time meant we went for it and visited all the inner sites of the gorge in one day. Tired but exhilarated we made our way back to our camp at Sandstone Park.



The view from the lookout towards the mouth of the gorge is pretty incredible. Photo: Bob West

Where is Carnarvon Gorge?

Carnarvon Gorge is at the eastern end of the vast sandstone belt of rugged ranges, gorges and plateaus that form the Central Highlands or Rooftop of Queensland. Much of this incredible feature has been dedicated as sections of the Carnarvon National Park with the Carnarvon Gorge section the most well known and the most readily accessed. Drive into the "Gorge" from Roma to the south, or Rolleston to the north. While we were there, the authorities were completing the last short section of dirt road before the park. Within the park itself, much of the last few kilometres of road are dirt with a number of parking bays for short walks before you arrive at the large parking area and the Visitor Centre. This is the jump off point for the magical gorge.

The Visitor Centre

Take your time at the Visitor Centre as there is a lot of information on display that relates to the life and form of the park. As an adjunct to this, I would suggest you take advantage of the Park Presentation at the Discovery Centre just before you enter the park. This multimedia presentation is highly professional and gives you a great feel for the natural and cultural history of the Gorge. This is given daily for a gold coin donation. They also run day and night tours in the park for those who wish to avail themselves of the knowledge and passion for the area these folk have.



The serene crossing at the upper gorge. Photo: Bob West

The Art Gallery

Every side gorge or walk presents you with a unique experience that often takes your breath away. The lower gorge has most of these, so often walkers only go as far as the Art Gallery and then work their way back. Time spent at the Art Gallery and in the Upper Gorge at Cathedral Cave is an inspiring and uplifting experience. There is an amazing number of engravings and stencils at these places that invoke a sense of wonder and awe at the importance of this spiritual place to the Aboriginal people of this area.



Wards Canyon

Wards Canyon was a totally unexpected experience. A short, steep track leads above and beyond a waterfall and transports you to another time and place. Giant king ferns grow in this little side gorge. They are remnants of another age, and other than this little oasis they're only found much further north in the tropical rainforests. With water tinkling through the little creek, you feel as though you are in a secret little garden all of your own.



A visit to Cathedral Cave is an inspiring experience. Photo: Bob West

The Amphitheatre

When you first get to the sandstone walls of the "Gorge" at the Amphitheatre, man's impact on the area is far from subtle. A steel ladder extends upwards to a split in the wall. This ladder is actually cleverly designed to allow floodwaters to flow unimpeded from the area hidden behind and above the Amphitheatre. After following a short path and steps through the cleft you are suddenly at the bottom of a gaping hole, with the sky seemingly a million miles away. This is a great place to just sit and contemplate while taking in the colours of the walls and the beauty of the moment.

The Moss Garden

The Moss Garden, besides being a beautiful haven, is also a mind-boggling insight into the workings of Nature. Water has been seeping down through the sandstone rock before hitting an impermeable layer shale and getting forced sideways for thousands of years. The water flows down the wall at the bottom of the "Gorge" and creates the perfect environment for mosses, ferns and liverworts to drape the rock in greenery. A cool and delightful twist to the overall experience.



The cool, damp moss garden is absolutely bursting with life. Photo: Bob West

The Main Walking Track

The main walking track crosses the creek many times on large boulders – strategically placed, well constructed and maintained in the Lower Gorge until the Art Gallery. After this, the path is marked but not maintained so finding the crossing stones can be a challenge. This section leads to Cathedral Cave and then Big Bend Camping Area. This was a great little spot where we lunched before launching our journey into all the side trips mentioned as we worked our way back.



Finding the crossing stones can be a challenge, but it's well worth it! Photo: Bob West



Climbing to the top of Boolimba Bluff

There are two ways to get a 3D picture of this great place. Helicopter flights are available, although, with respect for the Aboriginal custodians, there are no direct flights over the actual gorge. The other and more physical way is to climb to the top of Boolimba Bluff. The real enthusiast would do this climb of 900 steps in the dark to watch the sunrise over the plains and the “Gorge”. We opted to go a little later and were able to enjoy time at the top by ourselves soaking in the panorama before the hordes arrived.

The Rock Pool

We finished our visit by exploring the outside short walks on the access road into the Visitor Information Centre. The Rock Pool is the only place where swimming is allowed. The day we visited didn't encourage this but we were enthralled to spot a platypus swimming and to see numerous turtles sun-baking on the rocky shores.



The Rock Pool is the only place to swim – so bring your togs along!

Baloon Cave

Baloon Cave is a further connection with Aboriginal culture, with more stencils on display. This was the entry point for Aboriginal people to the “Gorge”. Finally, the Mickey Gorge Creek track meanders through pleasant scrub on a well-made path for 1.5km. It does go beyond for the more adventurous on an off-track adventure, which can include swimming across the pools!



The captivating view of Carnarvon Creek. Photo: Bob West

The Carnarvon Great Walk

For the really adventurous, experienced and fully self-contained there is also the Carnarvon Great Walk. This is an 87km journey through the wilderness taking 6 or 7 days.

Accommodation at Carnarvon Lodge

There is a number of options accommodation wise in the area. The Parks offer limited camping near the Visitor Information Centre but that is only available in school holidays and Easter.

Cabin and Lodge Accommodation

The Carnarvon Gorge Wilderness Lodge offers cabin accommodation while Takarakka Bush Resort offers a variety from swagging it to cabins.



Our set up at Sandstone Park. Photo: Bob West.

Camping at Sandstone Park

The option we took and thoroughly enjoyed is the newly opened Sandstone Park, a five minute drive from Carnarvon Gorge. This is for the self-contained camper, be it with swag, tent or camper trailer or caravan. There isn't power or water available, but there is a number of portaloos on site. The sites are huge, with awesome 360° views of the area.

Would I go back to Carnarvon Gorge?

In the visitor book at the National Park Centre, one couple were back for their 21st visit! I think this pretty much sums it up for us... we will be going back! So, get your camping gear together and experience the natural wonder of Carnarvon Gorge for yourself!

Have you experienced the wonders at Carnarvon Gorge? What's your favourite place to visit in Queensland?