

# Idalia National Park

**Management Plan**

1998

Prepared by: **Queensland Parks & Wildlife Service (QPWS), Department of Environment and Science**

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The Idalia National Park Management Plan 1998 has been extended in 2023, in line with the Queensland *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (s120G). Minor amendments have been made. There has been no change to the plan's original management intent and direction.

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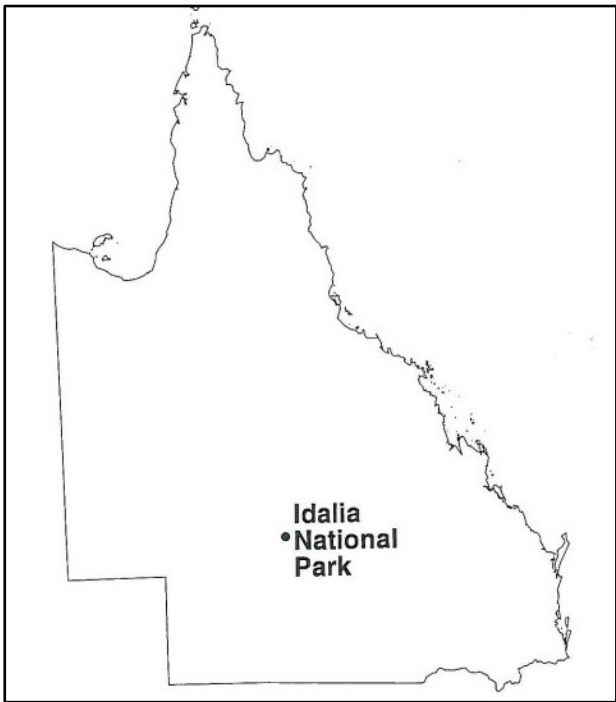
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**Summary**

This management plan provides the framework and guidelines on how Idalia National Park will be managed. It sets out the considerations, outcomes and strategies that proposed to form the basis on which day-to-day management decisions are made.

This plan was prepared in May 1998 and, and in accordance with s125 of the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* (Act). In 2023 the plan was extended, in keeping with s120G of the Act. For further information on this plan or the planning process, please contact the Department of Environment and Science at [ParkManagementPlans@des.qld.gov.au](mailto:ParkManagementPlans@des.qld.gov.au).

This management plan was prepared by Department of Environment and Science staff. Thanks are due to those groups and individuals who made submissions in response to the draft plan.

# Part A. Basis for management

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Planning area and regional setting

#### 1.1.1 Regional context

Idalia National Park is within the semi-arid zone of central-western Queensland and is located in the Gowan Range approximately 85 kilometres (km) south-west of Blackall and 250 km south-east of Longreach.

The principal objective of the 144,196 hectare park is to conserve samples of major ecosystems represented in the Mulga Lands biogeographic region. Eighteen of the 91 land systems found in this biogeographic region occur on the park.

Idalia National Park is considered to have high nature conservation value as it contains populations of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby *Petrogale xanthopus*. The park is also the site of a translocation project for the endangered bridled nailtail wallaby *Onychogalea fraenata*. At least eight rare or threatened plants are also found within the boundary of the park.

Scientific research on the park has enabled a great deal of natural resource data to be collated. Research into the ecology of macropod species is relevant to the management of macropod harvesting in the Blackall area and the monitoring of vegetation provides information that can be applied to the management of mulga on properties throughout the region.

Although Idalia does not have sufficient facilities to support many visitors, it offers opportunities for low-key nature-based recreation. As several nearby towns and properties in central-western Queensland are actively promoted as tourist destinations, the park has the potential to be a popular focus for visitors and commercial tourist operators.

#### 1.1.2 Land tenure

Idalia National Park was gazetted as a national park on 16 November 1990 and is managed by the Department of Environment and Science (DES).

#### 1.1.3 Management obligations

Idalia National Park is designated under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* as a national park and will be managed in accordance with s 17.1 of the Act which sets out the following management principles:

- To provide, to the greatest possible extent, for the permanent preservation of the area's natural condition and the protection of the area's cultural resources and values
- To present the area's cultural and natural resources and their values; and
- To ensure that the only use of the area is nature-based and ecologically sustainable.

The requirements of other legislation administered by the Department and other agencies will be met where necessary.

## 1.2 Management directions and purpose

### 1.2.1 Directions

Idalia National Park will be managed as an isolated national park with a limited level of development and infrastructure. The park will maintain its nature conservation and scientific research values and continue to provide recreational opportunities for visitors.

Conservation of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby and the bridled nailtail wallaby will remain a high priority.

Park visitors will enjoy a range of relatively undisturbed vegetation types which are representative of communities found in the Mulga Lands biogeographic region. The main recreational opportunities will be 4WD-based camping, bushwalking, birdwatching, nature-based photography and the viewing of macropods (in particular, they yellow-footed rock-wallaby).

Visitor use will be restricted to the northern section of the national park where features of visitor interest are located. This strategy will preserve the undisturbed natural values of the parks' southern portion.

Idalia National Park will continue to be one of the major scientific research sites in the semi-arid zone.

## 1.2.2 Purpose

The major purpose of management will be to ensure that:

### Conservation

- The yellow-footed rock-wallaby and its associated habitat are conserved.
- The bridled nailtail wallaby translocation project is successful, and the release of populations occurs under appropriate controlled conditions.
- Native animals are managed at ecologically sustainable levels.
- Rare and threatened plant species are conserved.
- The variety and diversity of vegetation communities (representative of communities found in the Mulga Lands biogeographic region) are conserved.
- Environmental weeds, feral animals and straying stock are controlled in consultation with park neighbours.
- The biological diversity and integrity of plant and animal communities are promoted through the responsible use of fire.
- Siltation of natural waterholes and further soil erosion of degraded sites are prevented through the implementation of effective rehabilitation measures.
- The quality and integrity of Idalia National Park's natural landscapes are maintained.

### Recreation and tourism

- Wilderness-based recreational activities such as 4WD-based camping, landscape and wildlife photography, bushwalking and birdwatching are developed on the park.
- Public viewing of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby in its natural habitat is managed to minimise damage.
- Visitor use is restricted to the park's northern section (unless visitors obtain prior permission from park staff to go elsewhere).
- The quality of visitor experiences is enhanced through appropriate interpretation and education strategies.
- Sites posing a significant risk to visitor safety are identified and effective control measures instigated.
- Commercial tour operators are allowed to operate on the park in an ecologically sustainable manner and in accordance with permit conditions.

### Research and scientific

- Organisations involved in scientific research are encouraged to use the park for research purposes.
- The Department is involved in giving approval for research projects occurring on the path to ensure that information collected is relevant to the park's management.

### Community involvement

- Community involvement neighbours are involved in the decision-making process of park management and made aware of activities that may be relevant to them (e.g. fencing, fire management and weed and feral animal control).
- Aboriginal groups with an interest in Idalia National Park are identified consulted and involved in the management of sites of aboriginal cultural heritage significance.

## 1.3 Values and resources

### 1.3.1 Natural

#### Geology and soils

The Gowan range is an extensive tableland system flanked by mesas, buttes and low rounded hills. Geologically the range consists of tertiary rocks of the Glendale formation which overlie deeply weathered Cretaceous sediments exposed on the slopes.

The predominant soil type found on the park is very shallow red loamy lithosol containing stone and gravel. Shallow red earths are found on the tablelands and deep red or brown cracking clays are located on the plains and deeply eroded valleys.

Numerous watercourses drain from the Gowan Range in all directions. The headwaters of the Bulloo River and its tributaries lie within the park and run to the south. Running Creek, Myrtle Creek and Fanning Creek drain to the north and east eventually feeding into the Barcoo River.

#### Native plants

Idalia National Park contains excellent examples of mulga *Acacia aneura* and bendee *A. catenulata* communities that are typical of the northern Mulga Lands biogeographic region. Silver-ironbark *Eucalyptus melanophloia*, poplar box *E. populnea*, bendo *E. exserta* and brigalow *A. harpophylla* are all found on the park and lie towards the western limits of their natural range.

Lancewood *A. petraea* and *A. shirleyi* and turpentine mulga *A. brachystachya* dominate communities found at Idalia are in the extremes of their ranges and hence are of biogeographic significance.

At least eight known rare and threatened plants are known to occur. These include *Rhaphidospora bonneyana* and *Xerothamnella parvifolia* which are vulnerable, and *Thryptomene hexandra*, *Ptilotus maconochiei* and *Euphorbia sarcostemmoides* which are rare plants are being discovered by park staff including an undescribed species of hakea which is only been located previously in Mariala National Park.

#### Native animals

The northern part of the Gowan range provide good habitat for yellow-footed rock wallabies *Petrogale xanthopus*, red kangaroos *Macropus rufus*, eastern grey kangaroos *M. giganteus*, black-striped wallabies *M. dorsalis* and common wallaroos *M. robustus* also occur on the park.

Idalia National Park is likely to be extremely rich in bat species (fourteen species have been recorded to date). The rare little pied bat has been identified on the park.

Several sightings of koalas *Phascolarctos cinereus* have been made permanent waterholes. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Idalia is an isolated western refuge for koalas that is currently disease-free.

The Idalia area is rich in bird life due to the variety and quality of habitats present. Some 138 species have been listed. These include several birds that occur at the limits of their distribution such as the eastern yellow robin *Eopsaltria australis*, speckled warbler *Chthonicola sagittata* and painted honeyeater *Grantiella picta*.

Hall's babblers *Pomatostomus halli*, mulga parrots *Psephotus varius* and crested bellbirds *Oreoica gutturalis* are commonly found throughout the park.

### 1.3.2 Cultural

#### Aboriginal heritage

The language group thought to have inhabited the local area were the Iningai people. Several stone arrangements are located on the park, as well as a number of stones scatters associated with permanent waterholes, springs and waterways. There is some evidence that stone toolmaking occurred in the Idalia area.

## Post-settlement heritage

Idalia National Park is made up of two former grazing properties. Idalia to the North was first taken up in 1877 and Collabara to the South has records dating back to 1919. Collabara is named after the collabara vine *Pandorea pandorea*, which is common throughout the mulga country.

Both properties were commonly referred to as third class grazing land. Throughout the park are remains of the grazing era in the form of Harvey's stake stockyards dating back to the 1920s. These yards were made of mulga brigalow and poplar box trees and were named after Jack Harvey, a local stockman who designed them.

The first dwelling on Idalia was a rough timber construction called 'Old Idalia'. The structure dates from about 1926 and was used as a ringer's camp until about 1950. Only ruins of the original dwelling remain.

The Collabara homestead is a prefabricated kit home dating back to 1926. It is still standing but is in poor condition. An area of 800ha around the homestead was fenced as a sheep run.

### 1.3.3 Scenic and aesthetic

Idalia provides many opportunities to enjoy panoramic views free from human infrastructure. Views from lookouts on the gallon range such as Emmet pocket and Old Idalia reveal many contrasting vegetation types and their associations with different soil and hydrological systems.

### 1.3.4 Recreation and tourism

The park offers low key nature-based recreation opportunities for local communities and for travellers who are well equipped and have a strong interest in the natural environment. Specific recreational opportunities at Idalia National Park include the viewing of macropods (in particular the yellow-footed rock-wallabies), vehicle-based camping experiences and bushwalking at appropriate times of the year.

The park currently does not have sufficient visitor infrastructure or staffing resources to handle a large number of visitors. Bushcamping is permitted at Monk's Tank although no water supply or toilet facilities are provided because the park has no large water body and the climate is often quite harsh in the months October to March, Idalia is most likely to appeal to well-equipped 4WD owners during the cooler winter months.

Idalia has potential for well-organised ecotourism. It is unlikely that the predicted increase in tourism to the west will have a great impact on the park as visitors are often discouraged by the climate, Idalia's distance from major population centres in the unsealed road conditions.

### 1.3.5 Economic

The park does not attract enough visitors to be self-funding. Local communities may benefit indirectly from visitors via shops, service stations and other services located in nearby towns. It has been estimated that scientific researchers visiting Idalia National Park spent over \$25,000 per annum in the Blackall community alone.

### 1.3.6 Research and scientific

Since 1991 Idalia has been the site of active ecological research with particular emphasis placed on several macropod species. Idalia National Park is being used in a project to translocate a viable population of the endangered bridled nailtail wallaby.

Other major research projects that have occurred on the park have studied:

- the impact of tourism on the yellow-footed rock-wallabies
- artificial water usage and habitat requirements of the yellow-footed rock-wallabies
- the impact of harvesting on red kangaroos in Queensland; and
- the nature of a semi-arid zone seed bank



Several significant findings have been made to date. However, it is important to build on the information already acquired and ensure that research is both applicable to and consistent with the management goals of the National Park.

### **1.3.7 Education and interpretation**

The University of Queensland currently uses the park for the field component of a semi-arid ecology third-year undergraduate subject. Specialised guided tours, naturalist groups and art groups have visited the park and the opportunity exists for school environmental field trips from Blackall, Barcaldine and Longreach to occur.

A visitor information sheet and face-to-face contact with park staff are the current forms of interpretation on the park. As increased visitation could occur during the life of this plan, an interpretive plan will need to be developed for Idalia National Park.

# PART B Management Strategies

## 2. Management of natural resources

### 2.1 Native animals

#### Background information

Idalia National Park is situated in an area supporting a high number of diverse plant communities which form the valuable natural habitats of an array of native animals. The native animals that take refuge on the park are an integral component of Idalia's value and character.

A number of artificial dams are located on the National Park, indicative of the area's grazing history. Artificial water supports high numbers of macropods which have an adverse impact on groundcover. This high grazing pressure could result in the loss of nutritional requirements for other native animals such as small mammals, reptiles, and birds.

The removal or fencing of artificial waters will affect different macropod species according to their reliance on water. Red Kangaroos are extremely mobile and can move to alternative water sources if artificial dams are removed. However, native animals with a more sedentary nature (such as yellow-footed rock-wallaby) can be more adversely affected by such an action.

Although a complete inventory has yet to be compiled, Idalia National Park has a rich diversity of native animals. Informal counts have revealed that at least 138 bird species, 7 species of macropods, 14 species of bats, a small number of small mammals and over 23 species of reptiles on the park.

The park has large populations of red kangaroos, eastern grey kangaroos and common wallaroos, and numbers of black-striped wallabies and swamp wallabies appear to be increasing steadily.

At least 16 permanent natural waterholes or springs are scattered throughout the park. Park staff are finding more as they come to know the area better. Some of the natural waterholes such as Reedy Spring, Mountain Waterhole and the springs at Collabara and Old Idalia have been affected by either trampling by stock or siltation.

#### Management outcomes

- To maintain the natural abundance and distribution of native animals and their habitats.
- To encourage biological studies on wildlife and identify species requiring specific management programs.

#### Proposed guidelines and actions

- A comprehensive survey of native animals found on Idalia National Park will be undertaken.
- Macropod numbers will be monitored as will the level of groundcover regeneration.
- the Ranger-In-Charge will maintain close liaison with local landholders to determine the nature of macropod damage to neighbouring pastures and implement a co-operative strategy to deal with neighbours' concerns.
- Research into native animals (in particular, macropods) and feral animal use of artificial water will be conducted in order to determine future strategies for artificial water management.
- Natural waterholes will be rehabilitated and protected from trampling a related damage (see section 2.8, soil and catchment protection.)

### 2.2 Native animals: Species of conservation significance

#### Background information

Idalia National Park is the only National Park in Queensland where yellow-footed rock-wallabies *Petrogale xanthopus* occur in reasonably large numbers. A number of colonies are located in areas in the northern section of the park. Yellow-footed rock-wallabies are also found on Welford National Park and are thought to on Mariala National Park, but only in small isolated pockets.

The translocation of the bridled naitail wallaby *Onychogalea fraenata* to Idalia National Park is an important project requiring continuing management.

Introduced predators such as foxes and cats and introduced species such as goats, which compete for food and shelter resources, pose major threats to the continued existence of the yellow-footed rock-wallabies and the translocated bridled naitail wallabies. Native predators such as dingoes are also a threat to these populations.

Viewing of the rock wallabies is a significant visitor experience, but it is important that viewing should not interfere with the habitat and life cycle of the species. The most suitable location for viewing is along the cliff edge to the east of Emmet Pocket lookout because:

- the likelihood of sighting a wallaby is high
- the wallabies can retreat freely down the cliff as people walk along the cliff edge
- road access to the lookout is by controlled by ranger contact; and
- visitors need not climb or scramble and are therefore safer.

### Management outcomes

- To conserve the yellow-footed rock-wallaby and its habitat.
- To understand the ecological and habitat requirements of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby in order to facilitate its protection.
- To successfully release and manage populations of the bridled naitail wallaby.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Further research on various ecological aspects of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby will be encouraged. Particular emphasis should be placed on the water requirements of the species and the effect on population numbers of removing artificial waters.
- A species management program will be developed and implemented the yellow-footed rock-wallaby. The programme will be considering issuing issue:
  - control of feral goats
  - control of predators (especially foxes)
  - monitoring of rock-wallaby numbers
  - provision of water sources, and
  - liaison with neighbours to minimise off park impacts on the species.
- Signs will be provided to direct visitors to Emmet Pocket Lookout to view the view the yellow-footed rock-wallaby. Visitors will be actively discouraged from viewing the yellow-footed rock-wallabies from other from other locations. Park staff will stress the importance of not disturbing the yellow-footed rock-wallabies and their habitat.
- The bridal naitail wallaby translocation project will continue, with predator control measures maintained.

## 2.3 Native plants

### Background information

There are 385 plant species listed for the park and at least seven rare or threatened species. A broad vegetation survey of Idalia National Park has been conducted as part of a recent vegetation mapping exercise.

The vegetation communities found on Idalia occur with respect to differences in landform and soil type and can therefore be broadly considered in terms of the park's topography. Most of the park is dominated by woodlands of various species including mulga *Acacia aneura* another Acacia species with mixed Eucalypts, bendo *Eucalyptus exserta*, mountain yapunyah *E. thozetiana*, desert gum *E. papuana* and Dawson gum *E. cambageana*. Watercourses aligned with river red gum, poplar box and brigalow.

In general, the extensive areas of mulga and bendee vegetation in the Gowan range have not been disturbed in recent decades. The mulga communities in the rest of the park range from mature old growth communities with weed-free understoreys to areas that are severely degraded.

The degraded mulga communities have been heavily grazed and show signs of the effect of fire. As adequate ground cover and tree densities have not been maintained, these areas have been subject to quite intense soil erosion.

Much of the brigalow and gidgee found in the incised valleys and lowest slopes near the park and was cleared shortly before park acquisition. These valleys and slopes comprise approximately 3 percent of the park's area. Areas cleared much earlier now support dense stands of brigalow, poplar box and gidgee regrowth.

Some of the alluvial flats at the northern end of the park were previously used for sorghum cropping and subsequent floods have washed away much of the topsoil. These flats have remained fairly barren as any grass cover that does establish is rapidly sought out by grazing macropods. Ensure plots show that grass re-establishment can be achieved.

Grazing pressure in Emmet Pocket has been particularly heavy due to the impact of straying stock.

Rare species include *Euphorbia sarcostemmoides*, *Calocephalus sonderi*, *Thryptomene hexandra* and *Ptilotus maconochiei*. Vulnerable species include *Hakea* sp. (Ambathala Range C. Sandercoe 507), *Rhaphidospora bonneyana* and *Xerothamnella parvifolia*.

### Management outcomes

- To maintain the biological health and diversity of natural plant communities and the long-term ecological processes supporting them.
- To restore the park's degraded plant communities.
- To conserve rare or threatened plant species and their habitats.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- The distribution, population size and habitats of rare and threatened plant species will be researched and identified. Further research into the habitat requirements of these species will be encouraged.
- Monitoring programs will be established to assess long-term changes in the distribution and health of native plant communities (e.g. Mulga Lands Grazing Monitoring project). The impacts of macropod grazing on ground cover will also be monitored.
- Disturbed areas or denuded sites will be rehabilitated by natural colonisation from surrounding areas. Scarifying, seeding or planting may be done as necessary using local species from seed sources found within the park.
- Unfenced boundaries will be fenced to exclude straying stock from the park.

## 2.4 Landscape

### Background information

Idalia National Park offers scenic views of the Gowan Range rising abruptly from the surrounding plains. Panoramic views of the different vegetation type can be seen from the residual mesas of Old Idalia and Emmet Pocket Lookout.

The park contains several gorges and rockholes such as Rainbow Gorge, Murphy's Rockhole, Berlin Rockhole and Morgan Springs. All are sheltered habitats that stand out from the surrounding environment.

Idalia's natural landscapes have essentially been well protected. Although scarring of the landscape has occurred due to past land clearing practices, natural vegetation is taking place.

Several of the springs have been cleared of old fencing material left by past graziers, and old rubbish dumps are located at the base of Old Idalia and near the old Collabara homestead.

Park staff are gradually collecting and burying the kilometres of old fencing and telephone wires scattered throughout the park.

Significant stands of vegetation on properties adjacent to the park provide important wildlife habitats and movement corridors. These areas contribute greatly to Idalia's overall landscape values.

### Management outcomes

- To preserve the quality and integrity of landscape values within the park.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- All proposed infrastructure will be assessed for possible impacts on the park's scenic and aesthetic values. Where possible, new fixed infrastructure will be designed to complement natural settings.
- The relics of past grazing occupation (e.g. old fencing and rubbish dumps) will be evaluated in terms of heritage value. Items deemed to be of little or no historical value will be buried or removed.
- Liaison will be conducted with park neighbours to highlight the importance of retaining areas of natural vegetation outside the park.

## 2.5 Environmental weeds

### Background information

A range of environmental weeds which are well adapted to the dry conditions of central western Queensland is found in Idalia National Park. North of the homestead are isolated pockets of Noogoora burr and Bathurst burr. These species are significant weeds along river and creek flats, on roadsides, in old cultivated paddocks and in some of the pasture lands of the sheep raising district surrounding Idalia.

The park contains the head waters of the Bulloo River and other creek systems, and therefore the propensity of weed species to colonise the area from upstream areas is only slight. However, existing topsoil may contain a considerable quantity of seeds which can remain viable for extended periods. Control of these weeds is therefore a long-term consideration.

Mexican poppies are also found in the northern region of the park. They are common summer flowering annuals and favour disturbed areas such as road shoulders, creek flats, stock routes and the land around dams.

Small areas of prickly pear *Opuntia inermis* occur amongst the brigalow; however, these contain the lava of the cactoblastis moth.

Parthenium *Parthenium hysterophorus* is a declared noxious plant which is a serious threat in the Central Highlands. An outbreak of parthenium occurred on the airstrip in January 1993 but was immediately controlled by spraying.

Buffel grass *Cenchrus ciliaris* is an introduced grass and has established successfully in some parts of the park. Although park staff do not consider the grass a major threat at present, it has the potential to spread if macropod grazing pressure on the park is reduced.

### Management outcomes

- Noxious weeds will be controlled.
- Environmental weeds will be controlled, with particular emphasis placed on those posing the most serious threat to park values.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- An annual weed control plan will be developed and implemented for the park. The plan will state:
  - the major weed species occurring on the park
  - the locations and severity of infestations
  - intended control measures for the current year
  - the equipment and staffing requirements and, and
  - the planned timing of control treatments.
- The weed control plan will be reviewed annually.
- The Department will liaise with neighbouring land holders to co-ordinate weed control efforts in the area.
- Opportunistic research will be conducted with a view to assessing the effectiveness of various control techniques for environmental weeds.

## 2.6 Feral animals

### Background information

Feral goats occur on the park. Control is continuing, with annual aerial surveys in all goats culled on site.

Dingoes have occasionally been seen around Claypan Dam and Cameron's Tank. Aerial dingo baiting is done in midwinter along the park's northern and eastern boundaries in conjunction with the Terrick Terrick Trust (a local sheep-grazing community project to protect stock from predation).

This baiting also targets foxes, which are the major feral animal threat to native wildlife on the park. Intensive fox control is a major management strategy of the bridal nailtail wallaby translocation project.

Small isolated pockets of rabbits are found between the homestead and the northern boundary. Incidental shooting occurs on a continuing basis and any warrens found are destroyed (although, due to the unstable nature of the cracking soil, most rabbits live in hollow logs).

A number of brumbies have been found at Emmet Pocket and Claypan Dam. Aerial and ground culling of horses occurs as resources permit.

Cattle that stray from Lissoy Holding (which has a 53 km unfenced boundary adjoining the park) have been located around Mountain Hole. As no stock-holding facilities exist on the park, owners are contacted immediately and advised to collect straying stock. Sometimes it is not economically viable for owners to collect their stock and so written permission is sought before park management dispose of stock.

### Management outcomes

- To eradicate feral animals where possible or minimise their impacts on the park.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Develop and implement a feral animal control plan. The plan will:
  - describe the distribution and abundance of feral animal species
  - describe the proposed control measures to be used for each species
  - state the timing of control measure
  - identify staff resources required
  - identify control costs and equipment; and
  - discuss park neighbours and Rural Lands Protection Board involvement.
- The feral animal control plan will be reviewed annually.
- Control measures for feral predators will be intensive in the vicinity of the yellow-footed rock-wallaby habitat, the bridled nailtail wallaby enclosures and unfenced establishment area.
- All unfenced boundaries will be fenced as soon as possible, subject to funding and labour constraints.
- The Highlands Holding boundary fence will be repaired to a sheep-proof standard.

## 2.7 Fire management

### Background information

Fire on Idalia has been infrequent in the past. The last extensive fire was recorded in the 1950s in the northern section of the park. Litter build-up and availability of other dry combustible material over much of the park is normally insufficient to support large scale fires. Many plant communities occurring on the park, including the mulga woodlands, are known to be very fire-sensitive and the historic absence of broad-scale fires in the area has probably contributed to the continued persistence and health of these communities.

Park management has an obligation to conduct 'ecological burning' where it is felt that such management will enhance species diversity and richness. It also has an obligation to protect visitors, park infrastructure and neighbouring properties from wildfires. This may be achieved through a program of hazard reduction burning and the construction and maintenance of firebreaks. Roads and some seismic lines are maintained as firebreaks an access routes throughout the park.

### Management outcomes

- To promote and protect the biological diversity and integrity of native plant and animal communities through the responsible management of fire.
- To protect visitors, park infrastructure and neighbouring properties from the effect of fire.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Research to identify possible benefits that might be gained through the use of ecological burning practices will be encouraged.
- A fire action plan will be developed. The plan will include:
  - ecological requirements of the various plant communities, including consideration of the need to exclude fire from specific communities
  - details of seasonal timing and location of prescribed burns
  - list of firefighting equipment and staffing requirements
  - procedures to be followed in the event of a wildfire
  - contact numbers of the District Fire Warden and other firefighting bodies; and
  - procedures for maintaining firebreaks.
- The fire action plan will be reviewed annually.
- All park staff will receive appropriate fire training.
- Neighbours will be involved in the development of the fire action plan and will also be advised of prescribed burning activities occurring on the park. Liaison with formal bodies involved in firefighting will continue to ensure that all information regarding fire management is kept up-to-date.
- Firebreaks and access routes will be developed and maintained.

## 2.8 Soil and catchment protection

### Background information

Idalia National Park encompasses an area of 144 196 ha which covers an extensive tableland system known as the Gowan Range. Numerous watercourses drain from the range in all directions. Part of this drainage forms the head waters of the Bulloo River which runs to the south. Various creeks draining to the north and west eventually feed into the Barcoo River.

A number of areas are severely sheet-eroded. The alluvial flats in the upper catchment of Twenty Mile Creek show the worst signs of scalding on the park. The high number of macropods at Idalia has impeded the re-establishment of permanent grass cover, leading to further soil erosion and degradation.

Clearing of trees and shrubs in the past has also exposed the soil surface to erosive agents such as water and wind. This process of erosion was exacerbated in the years of drought when the sparse ground layer was further denuded as a result of grazing pressure. The replacement of lost nutrients and organic matter is not likely to occur until mulga or eucalypt communities are re-established in these areas.

The decline in vegetation cover from sheet-eroded areas in the upper catchment is of particular concern to park management. Sheet erosion has caused many natural waterholes such as Danny's Hole, Reedy Spring and Gum Hole to silt up completely.

Straying sheep are causing severe erosion of Emmet Pocket Dam and its environs. The homestead area is badly scalded as a result of human and vehicular use of the area.

Erosion of the park's internal roads is a continuing problem for park management.

### Management outcomes

- To minimise the impact of park operations on the quality of ground and surface water, especially in the Bulloo River upper catchment area.
- To minimise soil erosion and siltation of natural water holes and watercourses on the park.
- To rehabilitate areas of intensive human and vehicular use.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Degraded areas will be rehabilitated by natural colonisation of vegetation from surrounding areas. Severely degraded sites will be rehabilitated by direct seeding or planting (using local species found in the park) as time and resources permit. Various techniques will be tested to determine their effectiveness in different areas.
- An appropriate monitoring program to assess water quality in the park's major watercourses will be developed and implemented.
- Emmet Pocket Dam will be fenced to prevent overgrazing of the surrounding area by feral animals and straying stock.
- Tree planting and rehabilitation of the homestead area will be continued in accordance with the landscape concept plan. Appropriate signs will be used to localise human and vehicular use of the homestead area.
- Internal park roads for use by visitors and park management will receive continuing attention. Roads will be hardened, and new roads will be designed and positioned to minimise the impact of water flow. Only the main access road and tourist routes on the park will be open to visitors. Other roads will be closed to visitors and marked 'service road only.'

## 3. Management of cultural resources

### 3.1 Aboriginal heritage

#### Background information

The area's importance to Aboriginal people is unknown and sites of particular cultural heritage significance have not been identified. The Iningai people are thought to have originally inhabited the area. All aboriginal sites within Idalia National Park are protected under the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and the *Cultural Record (Landscapes Queensland and Queensland Estate) Act 1987*.

Several stone arrangements and artefacts are scattered around some of the Idalia's natural waterholes. A stone quarry site is also located in the park.

#### Management outcomes

- To identify Aboriginal people with connections to the park and facilitate their involvement in its management.
- To protect sites of aboriginal cultural heritage significance found on the park.

#### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Aboriginal people who have interest in the Idalia area will be identified and encouraged to participate in the management of cultural heritage and interpretation of Idalia National Park.
- Aboriginal people's wishes will be considered in the management of all sites of Aboriginal cultural significance. Issues to be considered include the degree and nature of visitation and interpretation considered appropriate for the long-term maintenance of sites.
- Research into the Aboriginal occupation of the park and surrounding area will be encouraged.

### 3.2 Post-settlement heritage

#### Background information

Idalia National Park was originally comprised of two grazing properties. Evidence of pastoral occupation, in various states of disrepair, is found throughout the park. The original hut at Old Idalia is currently in ruins and the Collabara homestead is decaying, suffering termite and fungi attack.

The stake stockyards are generally in a poor condition, but some sections are fairly well preserved. Much of the internal fencing and telephone wiring has been rolled up and disposed of in the old rubbish dumps found within the park.



## Management outcomes

- To conserve and present sites of post settlement-cultural heritage significance.

## Proposed guidelines and actions

- Heritage sites and structures on the park will be protected and the feasibility of interpretation of these sites will be investigated.
- Heritage information will continue to be collected and made available to visitors at the park office.
- The stake stock yards will be assessed for historical value and representative sections that are in reasonable condition will be retained for display. Parts that pose a significant safety risk to visitors will be removed. A comprehensive photographic record of the stockyards will be developed before safety or restoration work commences.
- The historical value of rubbish dumps will be assessed, and significant items or sites will be preserved. Rubbish dump sites will then be buried to minimise the risk to visitors to the park.

# 4. Management of recreation and tourism

## 4.1 Recreation, tourism and visitor use

### Background information

Idalia National Park offers nature-based recreation near the historic towns of Blackall and Isisford. The main activities on the park include the viewing of macropods (in particular, the yellow-footed rock-wallabies), bird watching, nature-based photography, bushwalking in the cooler months of the year and remote, vehicle-based camping.

The distance from nearby towns, the poor condition of the unsealed roads (especially in wet weather) and the lack of any significant water mass may discourage many people from visiting the park. The harshness of this semi-arid environment in the summer months is extremely uninviting and so it is anticipated that only interested naturalists and self-sufficient four-wheel-drive enthusiasts will visit the park.

At present, annual visitor numbers are quite low (55 visitors in 1995). The numbers may increase as the park becomes better known. Visitor numbers peaked during July and September each year. Most visitors are local or are people who hear about the park through research associations. Naturalists with a specific interest in the park's native plants and animals are also attracted to Idalia.

As the main road from Blackall to Windorah is sealed for only the first 40 km, access into the park is difficult both during and after wet conditions (even in 4WD vehicles).

Visitors are directed to the northern section of the park for safety reasons and ease of access. This is also the region with the highest concentration of interesting sites.

The park's range of nature-based opportunities includes excellent bird watching possibilities at Junction Hole and bush camping at Monk's Tank. No water supply or toilets are provided at the campground, so campers must be self-sufficient. Park staff discourage the collection of firewood.

Visitors can take advantage of a number of bushwalking opportunities, the most notable being:

- a 2 km walk from Emmet Pocket Lookout skirting the cliff edge, providing ample opportunity to view the yellow-footed rock-wallabies
- a 5 km walk in the shade of thick mulga woodlands to Murphy's Hole
- a 5 km walk from Rainbow Gorge down the creek line, offering the opportunity to view several different plant communities; and
- a 1 km walk to Old Idalia in the nearby escarpment.

The park has no rubbish disposal facilities for visitors.

### Management outcomes

- To provide a range of opportunities for nature-based recreation that is ecologically sustainable and promote the special character of Idalia.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Idalia will be promoted to visitors as a relatively remote, self-sufficient park with minimal facilities. Pre-visit information will be in written form and only available to those who specifically request it.
- Internal park roads will be maintained to 4WD standards and visitors will be advised to leave their caravans in Blackall. Visitors will be warned about the likelihood of being stranded on the park in wet weather and the necessity of carrying extra water and food provisions.
- Visitors will be directed to the park's northern section where visitor facilities and features of visitor interest are located. This will also minimise visitor impacts in other areas.
- The campground at Monk's Tank will be monitored for visitor impacts. Toilet facilities will be installed, and more intensive management of the site will be applied if impacts become unacceptable.
- A walking track system will be developed and maintained in the park's northern section.
- Visitors will be discouraged from gathering firewood from the park.
- Visitors will be instructed to take their rubbish with them on departure from the park.

## 4.2 Safety

### Background information

The Department has an obligation to provide a safe working environment for park staff and to minimise the potential of visitor injuries from built and natural hazards. The park cannot be managed in such a way as to completely negate the risks, however, as there will always be some risk of injury whenever a person undertakes activities in a natural environment. The park is therefore managed so as to minimise the risks to health and safety from hazards as far as reasonably possible.

The Regional Workplace Health and Safety Manual outlines the Department's safety policy and the strategies and procedures required to implement this policy. Reference to this document should be made in all matters connected with workplace health and safety. Of particular relevance to this management plan is the risk management policy which outlines the procedure for identifying and assessing hazards and implementing appropriate control measures.

Idalia's size and remoteness give rise to the possibility of accidents involving missing and/or injured persons. There is a public expectation and management requirement that adequate resources and procedures be put in place to respond to search and rescue situations.

### Management outcomes

- To minimise safety risks to park staff and visitors.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Park visitors will be directed to inform the Ranger-in-charge of their visit and provide their daily itinerary and proposed time of departure from Idalia.
- Areas and structures for public and Department use will be maintained in a safe condition. Where hazards cannot be removed or avoided, appropriate warning signs will be erected.
- Hazard identification and risk assessment forms for all identified natural and built hazards will be completed. Control measures instigated will be of the highest level considered reasonable under the circumstances.
- All work practices will be carried out in accordance with Regional Safety procedures and Australian Safety Standards where appropriate.
- An emergency action plan will be developed. The plan will describe:
  - general visitor safety procedures
  - search and rescue procedures
  - procedures for evacuating, treating and hospitalising staff and visitors; and
  - the contact details of various authorities who can lend assistance in the case of emergencies.
- Search and rescue training of park staff will be conducted in conjunction with the local state emergency service branch.

## 4.3 Interpretation and public contact

### Background information

Interpretation is an important tool to help enhance the quality of visitor experiences, shape the public image of an area and engender public support in the local community for management objectives. Conservation of the park is also supported when visitor behaviour is influenced by effective interpretation and public contact. A visitor information sheet has been prepared for Idalia National Park. An extensive literature review on the history of the park has been collated and is available at the park office for viewing by interested visitors. Bird and plant species lists have also been compiled and pressed plant specimens are held at the park, enabling visitors to identify unfamiliar plants.

The park has yet to develop official national park signs to direct visitors to and within the park.

### Management outcomes

- To present the park's natural and cultural resources an important management issues to visitors and neighbours.
- To develop responsible visitor behaviour consistent with the sustainable use of the park.
- To increase public awareness of, understanding of and support for the actions of park management within the wider central-western Queensland community.
- To maintain good relations between park management and neighbours, based on the Department's Good Neighbour Policy.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- An interpretation plan for the park will be developed, with:
  - the identification of target audiences (both on and off the park)
  - the identification of appropriate communication strategies; and
  - the identification and development of interpretive themes for the park (e.g. yellow-footed rock-wallabies, translocation of bridled nailtail wallabies and biogeographic significance of the mulga vegetation community).
- Roadside directional signs and signs to encourage appropriate visitor behaviour will be developed and installed.
- Park information will be disseminated throughout through various media in accordance with Department policy, to keep the wider community informed of park and conservation issues.
- The Ranger-In-Charge will contact park neighbours at least twice a year. Park management will respect neighbours' concerns and strive to engender a positive, co-operative approach to problem-solving.
- Neighbours will be encouraged to adopt community nature conservation practices where possible. Helping landholders identify native animals and native plants can lead to a greater awareness of their own properties' natural values.
- The Ranger-In-Charge will keep a written record of all important informal communication with neighbours and local authorities.

## 4.4 Commercial tour operators

### Background information

Commercial guided tour operators are able to provide opportunities for people to appreciate and learn about the values of the park. Accredited and properly informed tour operators have the potential to promote a conservation ethic and provide a high-quality visitor experience. To date, no commercial operations have applied to operate on Idalia National Park.

### Management outcomes

- To provide for ecologically sustainable commercial operations to be carried out on the park.

### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Regulation of commercial operations will be achieved through the Nature Conservation Regulations. Any operator conducting a commercial activity within the park will be required, under the Regulation, to hold a permit to conduct the activity. Permits issued will be subject to any conditions imposed by the chief executive.

## 5. Management of sustainable use

### 5.1 Scientific and research

#### Background information

Idalia National Park supports wildlife and ecological research activities conducted by the Department and the University of Queensland. The latter regularly conducts both applied and academic research projects on the park (approximately 2600 person days a year). Information collected through these projects forms the basis for advancing park planning and management practices. It is crucial to ensure, however, that research operations do not in themselves threaten park values or interfere with other legitimate park uses.

The state's highest macropod harvest takes place in the Blackall region, so it is considered appropriate that State commercial macropod research should be centred in this area. Idalia is thus an important 'control' area for macropod research. The University of Queensland is involved in Australia wide long-term macropod population density surveys and has maintained a keen interest in conducting research on park.

Other aspects of semi-arid ecology have also been the subject of research such as projects concerning the yellow-footed rock-wallaby and mulga vegetation communities.

The peak period of research activity occurs in July, when approximately 40 undergraduate students and 10 teaching staff from the University of Queensland converge on the park for an intensive week of field work for a semi-arid ecology subject.

Apart from applied work on endangered species, the Department also conducts projects which seek to elucidate the ecology of native grasslands and the effects of macropod and stock grazing pressure. Various exclusions have been set up for this purpose.

#### Management outcomes

- To encourage and facilitate research on the park, with particular emphasis on projects that are of direct relevance to the park management.
- To communicate research results in a form useful to park management and the wider community.

#### Proposed guidelines and actions

- Research projects for Idalia and other protected areas will be identified through a co-operative process with the University of Queensland as part of the Region's annual business planning activities.
- The Department will continue to provide logistical support for approved research projects, subject to availability of staff and funding resources.
- Recreational visitors to the park will be kept separate from research operations and management will ensure that the legitimate rights of the respective groups are catered for in a complementary and harmonious fashion.
- Research information will be collected and reviewed, and implications for management will be considered regularly.
- A code of conduct will be developed for researchers and volunteers. All researchers and volunteers will be advised of this code and will be required to comply with it.

### 5.2 Park administration and management

#### Background information

#### Staffing

Currently two permanent rangers (one full-time and one part-time) and one temporary ranger are employed at Idalia National Park. A district manager based in the Longreach District Office assists and supervises park staff. The District Office provides financial and administrative support to the ranger staff as well as staff support for park work such as fence construction, weed control and natural resource surveys.

A specialist resource group based in the Toowoomba Regional Office provide specific advice and expertise, when required, on natural resource monitoring and management.

### **Park office and work area**

The old stockmen's quarters have been converted into the park office and are currently in good condition.

The park has very good workshop facility, but a fuel shed and drainage bay are needed to comply with the workplace health and safety regulations.

### **Visitor and research facilities**

Three demountable shelters, a shower and toilet block, and a barbecue area have been built for use by researchers. New amenities may be required if research use increases.

No public facilities have been provided at the campground at Monk's Tank.

### **Access roads**

The main access road from the northern boundary has undergone considerable roadworks in the form of drainage channels and gravel-hardened areas. The park has several other roads that require annual maintenance due to damage caused by heavy flooding. These roads must be maintained in a serviceable condition for park management purposes.

### **Fencing**

Under the Good Neighbour Policy the Department provides the materials required for neighbours' to erect boundary fences. Large areas of the park (in particular, the boundary adjoining Lissoy Holding) are currently unfenced and require urgent attention.

The Ranger-In-Charge carries out maintenance of boundary fencing. As boundary fencing bordering on unstocked country is often of little concern to park neighbours, park staff make periodic repairs to ensure that the park's fences are functioning effectively.

### **Infrastructure management**

Park staff manage the park's infrastructure. At present, maintenance programs tend to be reactive in nature, with most infrastructure repaired or replaced as the need arises.

### **Management outcomes**

- To ensure that guidelines identified in this plan are implemented.
- To provide adequate staff and resources for the effective management of the park.
- To administer the *Nature Conservation Act 1992* and subordinate legislation.

### **Proposed guidelines and actions**

- Staff work programs will be developed in accordance with this with the strategic guidelines set out in this plan and will be reflected in the development of staff performance planning and review documents.
- A structured program for the development and maintenance of park infrastructure will be designed and implemented. This will include:
  - the erection of new boundary fencing adjoining Lissoy Holding and the repair and maintenance of other fences; and
  - the installation of public utilities at Monk's Tank (such as septic toilets, tables, shelter and rainwater tank).
- Storage of fuel and other materials at the homesite and elsewhere will be in accordance with the workplace health and safety regulations.