



ADVENTURE: Checking out the beauty of Smith's Creek.

KIDS' STUFF

Park it at Ku-ring-gai

Take in the wonders of a national park, **Briar Jensen** writes.

PRISING the kids off the couch or away from the computer and into the great outdoors all seems worth the effort when you see them eagerly leading the way on a bush track, scampering happily around rock pools, or exclaiming excitedly at their discovery of a hidden waterfall.

We recently visited Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, a 15,000-hectare bush playground, just 25 kilometres north of Sydney. Encompassing spectacular Cowan Creek and its tributaries, the park offers a variety of activities, in the bush and on the water, from sedate to adventurous.

The rugged sandstone hills feature rock outcrops, weather-worn caves and numerous waterfalls. The predominantly eucalypt forest is home to a variety of wildlife from echidnas, wallabies and goannas to parrots, lyrebirds and sea eagles. Until recently there were many koalas, too.

To fully appreciate the park, including its Aboriginal and historical sites, it's a good idea to collect the free brochures, maps and track notes from the park gates or Kalkari Visitor Centre. If you would like more detailed information or pictorial keepsakes, you can buy some excellent publications at the Information and Retail Centre at Bobbin Head or see www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au.

It's also a great place for kids to spend their allowance, with a variety of posters, toys and souvenirs to choose from.

■ **Kalkari Visitor Centre and Discovery Track:** For an easily accessible snapshot of what the park has to offer, take the Kalkari Discovery Track adjacent to the visitor centre. This ridge-top walk, which is wheelchair and stroller friendly, meanders through a variety of habitats - and track notes provide information on the flora and fauna.

Little kids love the pond with its long-necked tortoises. For older children with a camera, the track provides great photographic opportunities, from close-ups of sandstone and scribbly gums to panoramic vistas over Cockle Creek.

They can also get close to kangaroos, emus and the occasional echidna on the side of the track.

The visitor centre has touchable exhibits and a theatre.

Ku-ring-gai Chase Road, east of Mount Colah. Open 9am-5pm every day except Christmas Day. Phone: 9472 9300.

■ **Bobbin Head and Gibberagong Mangrove Boardwalk:** Extensive picnic areas line the foreshore at Bobbin Head. Shelters, toilets and a children's playground make this an ideal spot for lunch after touring the visitor centre. Pelicans perch on the wharf pylons, while ferries come and go. Wander through the Park Information and Retail Centre in historic Bobbin Head Inn, or admire the old cruisers at Halvorsen Marina.

Work off your lunch by strolling along the Gibberagong Boardwalk, which meanders through the mangroves just above the waterline. Children love watching the crabs scurrying around at low tide.

Free fun information sessions run here on selected Sunday afternoons. See fact box. Park Information and Retail Centre, Bobbin Head Inn. Access via Ku-ring-gai Chase Road or Bobbin Head Road from North



BACK TO NATURE: Cowan Creek has many secluded beaches for exploring and fun.

Turrumurra. Open every day except Christmas Day, 10am-4pm weekdays, 10am-5pm weekends. Phone: 9472 8949.

■ **West Head and Garigal Aboriginal Heritage Walk:** West Head Lookout provides spectacular views across Broken Bay and over Pittwater to Barrenjoey Head. Take binoculars and a compass for the kids to use. Wallabies can often be seen on the rock ledges surrounding the lookout. Chase Alive volunteers "meet and greet" here on Sundays and share

their knowledge of the area. You can picnic here or at nearby Resolute Picnic Area, which provides access to Garigal Aboriginal Heritage Walk.

Garigal is the name of the Aboriginal clan who occupied this area. Good signage and an excellent brochure on the rock art, engraving and shelter sites make this an excellent educational experience. Collect the brochure at the park gates or visitor or information centres.

Access to the lookout is via West Head Road. Open sunrise to sunset.

■ **Hiking tracks:** For more serious bushwalkers there is an extensive network of self-guided tracks throughout the park, ranging in length and difficulty, from easy 15-minute strolls to strenuous walks of up to 14.5 kilometres.

Track notes, which detail routes and estimate walking times, are available from the park entry gates or visitor and information centres.

If you prefer to walk in a group or want to learn along the way, take a Guided Discovery Walk for \$6 for

adults and \$3 for children. Bookings essential on 9472 9300.

■ **On the water:** Cowan Creek and its tributaries were formed by the flooding of steep-sided valleys at the end of the Ice Age.

Paddling, rowing or putting along in a dinghy gives you a totally different perspective of the park and allows access to many secluded beaches.

Exploring tiny inlets can lead to discoveries of waterfalls, rock pools and Aboriginal middens.

IF YOU GO

■ Park entry \$10 per vehicle. See www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au. Click on NSW Parks then select Ku-ring-gai Chase. Includes detailed information on the park and how to get there, including public transport.

■ *Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park Guidebook* includes history, geology, flora and fauna, a pullout map and excellent photographs; *Discovering Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park On Foot*, by Alan Fairley, describes 29 walks in detail and includes a wildflower calendar; *Kalkari Kids Day* tells of Aboriginal culture and bush tucker and includes painting a didgeridoo.

■ Free kids' activities - of one-hour duration - help celebrate environmental events with displays, puppets or stories, followed by a discovery walk learning about local fauna.

There is a canoe launching ramp at Bobbin Head and public boat ramps at Apple Tree Bay and Akuna Bay.

Halvorsen Marina at Bobbin Head hires rowing skiffs for \$15 for the first hour and \$5 each subsequent hour. Launches start at \$50 an hour to \$105 for a day. Phone 9457 9011 or see www.halvorsenmarina.com.au. Cottage Point Kiosk has aluminium runabouts for \$25 per hour, \$60 a half-day or \$95 a full day. Phone: 9456 3024 or see www.cottagepointkiosk.com.au.