

# KU-RING-GAI CHASE NP

BRIAR JENSEN explored a national park and waterway just north of Sydney that could be a million miles from civilisation, and which offers just as many photo opportunities.

**F**ifteen thousand hectares of rugged bush cling to the hillsides, which plunge to a base of weathered sandstone before piercing the waters of Cowan Creek. Goannas saunter through the undergrowth while kookaburras cackle in the treetops. This is Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park, just 25km north of Sydney and an easy 30-minute drive from the central business district.

The park is rich in native flora and fauna, as well as Aboriginal and historic sites, and it provides photographers with an enormous variety of photo opportunities. Access to the park is via four sealed roads (or by boat). A good starting point is the south-west corner, where Ku-ring-gai Chase Road forms a loop past Kalkari Visitor Centre and Bobbin Head.

A variety of printed information is available from Kalkari Visitor Centre and for those wanting to know more about

Aboriginal culture or Australian animals, there are video shows in the theatre.

Adjacent to the centre is Kalkari Discovery Trail where a wheelchair-friendly track meanders through a range of habitats giving easy access to many interesting close-up photos. A lookout provides an opportunity for panoramic shots of the adjacent gorge, while a bird feeding station allows for close-ups of parrots and rosellas when staff put seed out each morning.

Further along Ku-ring-gai Chase Road is Bobbin Head, which has extensive recreation areas along the Cowan Creek foreshore, with 1930s era picnic shelters and pavilions. Boats bob at their moorings just a few metres offshore and colourful ferries tie up to the wharf, watched by pelicans perched atop the wooden piers. The nearby boatshed is home to many classic Halvorsen cruisers and the tiny workshops of the local shipwrights.

The park information centre and

Wildlife Shop is located in historic Bobbin Head Inn and sells some excellent publications on the park as well as more detailed maps and guides to the walking tracks. Also located at Bobbin Head is the Gibberagong mangrove boardwalk. A cable footbridge spans Cockle Creek and joins the boardwalk, providing a chance to get close to the base of the mangrove ecosystem without getting dirty feet.

A side road leads from Bobbin Head to Apple Tree Bay, another popular picnic spot and boat launching ramp. On the eastern side of the park is Coal and Candle Drive, which is accessed via Mona Vale Road. Cottage Point Road, which veers off to the west, leads to the only pocket of residential land located on Cowan Water.

Cottage Point Kiosk is situated on the waterfront and its verandah overlooks moored boats at the entrance of Coal and Candle Creek. Located on the headland next door is the weatherboard clubhouse



A Kookaburra pays a visit to our boat.

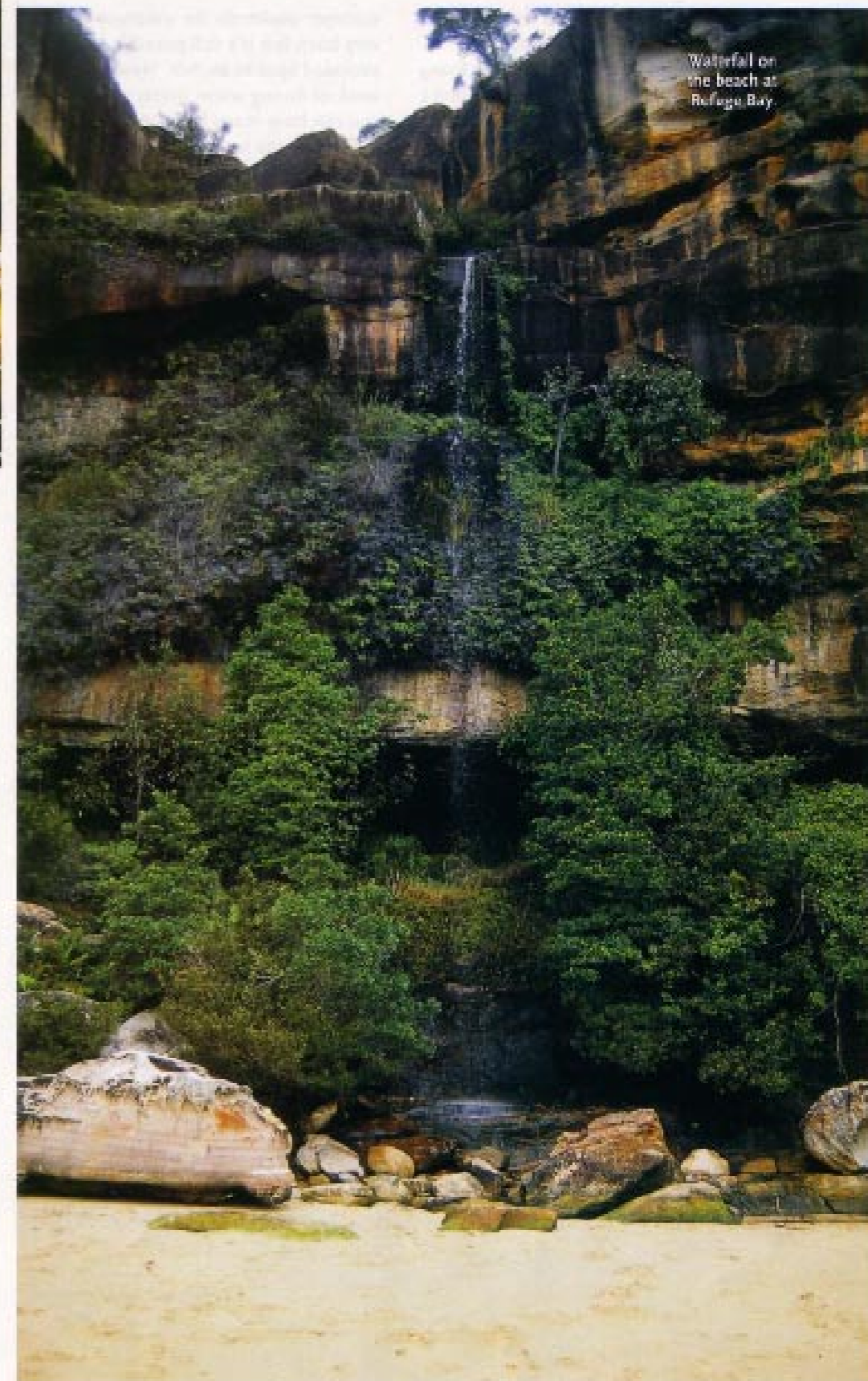
of Ku-ring-gai Motor Yacht Club, which commands a spectacular view north over Cowan Water. Adjacent to Cottage Point Inn is a public wharf where you can photograph yachts sailing past or the seaplane coming into the restaurant's jetty.

Further along Coal and Candle Drive D'Albora Marina nestles in the tiny inlet of Akuna Bay. A dry storage rack has several layers of small boats, while the floating marina is home to many large and opulent vessels providing the opportunity for photos with a nautical theme. Akuna Bay General Store puts on free open-air jazz concerts most Sunday afternoons and this is a great chance to get "up-close and personal" shots of musicians and their instruments.

Coal and Candle Drive eventually meets up with West Head Road, which leads to West Head Lookout. This well-maintained area has expansive views from the mouth of the Hawkesbury River, across Broken Bay and Pittwater to Barrenjoey Head and the Pacific Ocean.

While some stunning shots can be captured from lookouts and picnic spots, the best way to explore the park from a photographic viewpoint is on foot or by boat. The National Parks and Wildlife Service has established an extensive network of walking tracks, which vary in length and difficulty. Track notes, which detail routes and specify walking times, are available from the park entrance gates, the information centre or Kalkari Visitor Centre.

For those wishing to photograph Aboriginal engravings a separate brochure provides maps of the sites and includes background information. In 1994 bush fires ravaged extensive areas of the park and evidence of their destruction and subsequent regrowth



can be accessed from the tracks, as can the abundance of wildflowers that bloom over spring and summer.

Guided walks are also available. Volunteers will take visitors on a range of hikes and nature activities, including the occasional nature photography class. (Programs are available from Kalkari Visitor Centre.) One of the guides, William

Mason, maintains "there's always time for a picture. The whole aim of the walks is to get people out there to see things."

The waterways of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park were formed by the flooding of steep-sided valleys at the end of the ice age. These gorges contain lots of waterfalls that trickle down moss-covered slopes or tumble over rocky outcrops while the

sandstone shorelines reveal textures created by years of wind and water.

It's this area of the park, with its many creeks, inlets and isolated beaches that I find most spectacular and which is best explored from the water.

Boats of every size ply Cowan Water, from canoes through to large motor cruisers. During the holidays and

summer weekends the waterway can be very busy, but it's still possible to find a secluded spot to anchor. However, mid week or during warm winter weekends you can have many locations to yourself.

Boat ramps leading to Cowan Water can be found at Apple Tree Bay and Akuna Bay. There is also a canoe-launching ramp at Bobbin Head. If you

Morning mist in Stingray Bay, Smiths Creek.



Patterns in the sand on Hallett's Beach.



An echidna on the Kalkari Discovery trail.

want to hire a boat there are many options, including tinnies, yachts, cruisers and houseboats.

Waterfalls can be accessed by boat with a lot less exertion than on foot. One of the tallest is found right on the beach at Refuge Bay. Here the water tumbles over a sandstone precipice to pummel the rocks at its base before creating patterns in the sand on its way down the beach.

Hidden waterfalls can be heard at the head of almost every creek and inlet and are easily found by taking a dinghy to the end of the creek and following the sound of cascading water. However, during and after heavy rain spontaneous waterfalls can sprout anywhere along the water's edge.

Exploring by boat also makes for some interesting wildlife shots. Kookaburras often land on boat railings, providing excellent close-up opportunities. Goannas will also sometimes oblige by paying a visit to your beach picnic - just make sure the lid is on the Esky! And remember, while goannas usually move quite slowly, they don't pause to pose, so you need to have your camera at the ready.

### Best Times & Film Supplies

While there are excellent photo opportunities available throughout the year you may want to plan your trip to capture



certain images. Massed wildflowers are best from June through to September and waratahs from September to early October. However, some wildflowers are in bloom over the summer months.

The best time for shooting Aboriginal engravings is during winter when the sun is low in the sky. This is also a good time for misty morning shots and dramatic waterfalls. Only very basic print film is held at the kiosks and stores in the park so it's best to take all supplies with you.

### Visitor Information & Hire Boats

**Kalkari Visitor Centre**, Ph (02) 9457 9853  
**Park information centre and Wildlife Shop**, Ph (02) 9472 8949  
**Cottage Point Kiosk and Boat Hire**, Ph: (02) 9456 3024  
**Halvorsen Boats, Bobbin Head**, Ph (02) 9457 9011  
**Clipper Cruiser Holidays, Akuna Bay**, Ph (02) 9450 0000

Alternatively, a variety of craft can be hired from Brooklyn or Pittwater.

### Accommodation

Accommodation within the park is limited. Serviced camping ground, The Basin, Pittwater Ph:(02) 9974 1011  
YHA Hostel, Towlers Bay, Pittwater, Ph:(02) 9999 2196  
Towlers Bay House (four-bedrooms, weekends only), Towlers Bay, Pittwater Ph:(02) 9974 1011

These three places are accessed by foot from West Head Road, by water taxi, or



The Gibberagong mangrove boardwalk.

ferry from Palm Beach or Church Point.

**Cottage Point Inn** (self-contained apartments for bed and breakfast)  
Cottage Point, Ph:(02) 9456 1011

### Suggested Reading

*Discovering Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park On Foot* by Alan Fairley, Envirobook  
*Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park* by National Parks & Wildlife Service, Wentworth Press  
*Cruising Guide to the Hawkesbury River and Cowan, Broken Bay, Pittwater* by John and Jocelyn Powell, Deerubbin Press. ■