

Title:

Central Australia: The Eastern MacDonnell Ranges

Word Count:

663

Summary:

The rugged ridges of the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges stretch east from the outback Central Australian town of Alice Springs for some 200 kilometres, and are every bit as picturesque as the better known West MacDonnell Ranges. The ranges are home a spectacular array of natural features and landscapes, all within an easy hour or two from Alice Springs by car.

Keywords:

alice, springs, central, australia, eastern, macdonnell, ranges, tour, travel, holiday, vacation

Article Body:

The rugged ridges of the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges stretch east from the outback Central Australian town of Alice Springs for some 200 kilometres, and are every bit as picturesque as the better known West MacDonnell Ranges. The ranges are home a spectacular array of natural features and landscapes, all within an easy hour or two from Alice Springs by car.

Access to the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges is via the Ross Highway east from Alice Springs. The road is sealed for the first 75 kilometres, with an unsealed road continuing to the Ross River Homestead and Arltunga. The unsealed road is maintained in good condition and is suitable for two-wheel-drive vehicles and caravans. Many tracks in the region, such as those extending from Arltunga to Ruby Gap Nature Park, and from the Ross River Homestead to Ndhala Gorge, are suitable only for four-wheel-drive vehicles.

In addition to several spectacular natural features such as Emily and Jessie Gaps, Corroboree Rock, Trephina Gorge, Ndhala Gorge and Ruby Gorge, the East MacDonnell Ranges also offer the opportunity to step back into Central Australia and the Northern Territory's history at the Arltunga Historical Reserve, and to fossick for zircon, garnet, beryl, apatite and tourmaline at Gemtree. Eastern Arrernte culture has a long history in this region.

Arltunga is located about 120 kilometres east of Alice Springs, and was the first town to be built in Central Australia. Established in 1887, this historic

mining town is today a true ghost town. Preserved by the aridity of the surrounding desert environment, many of Arltunga's original stone buildings remain in excellent condition. Arltunga is named after a subgroup of the indigenous Arrernte people who have lived in the area for over 20,000 years.

Emily And Jessie Gaps are two gorges in the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges quite close to Alice Springs. Both sites are of great significance in the Yipirinya Dreamtime story which describes the creation of the Alice Springs landscape, being the location where the Caterpillar ancestors of the indigenous Central and Eastern Arrernte people met. Both sites are popular local picnic spots. The Corroboree Rock Conservation Reserve is a small reserve about 50 kilometres from Alice Springs. It contains a rock formation of special significance to the Eastern Arrernte people, being a site where traditional initiation ceremonies took place.

The Trephina Gorge Nature Park is located about 85 kilometres east of Alice Springs, and is arguably the most attractive of the many natural features in the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges. Its stunning scenery includes huge River Red Gums, sandy creek beds, semi-permanent waterholes and towering red rock-walled gorges. There are five marked walking tracks in the area, taking from 45 minutes to 6.5 hours to complete. Campers often base themselves at Trephina Gorge, venturing out on day trips to explore other attractions such as Arltunga and Ndhala Gorge. Trephina Gorge is noted for its sheer quartzite cliffs and broad, River Red Gum lined sandy watercourses. Many examples of Central Australia's unique flora and fauna are abundant in the area, including majestic Wedge-Tailed Eagles which lend their name to the Valley of the Eagles.

Ndhala Gorge Nature Park is located about 98 kilometres east of Alice Springs. It is a significant Aboriginal art site containing over one thousand ancient rock carvings or petroglyphs, sheltered for thousands of years by the rugged red walls of two rocky gorges. The carvings and varied flora can be viewed on a short walk. A number of indigenous cypress-pine trees unique to the Central Australian ranges grow along the exposed slopes. The dirt road into Ndhala Gorge is accessible to conventional vehicles in good weather, but it can be very rough in places and a four-wheel-drive vehicle is recommended.

The Ruby Gap Nature Park is located about 140 kilometres east of Alice Springs. Ruby Gap was the scene of a rush of activity by miners in 1886 seeking rubies which later proved to be worthless garnets. It is one of the most beautiful gorges along the Hale River which winds through the Park, but accessible by four-wheel-drive vehicle only.