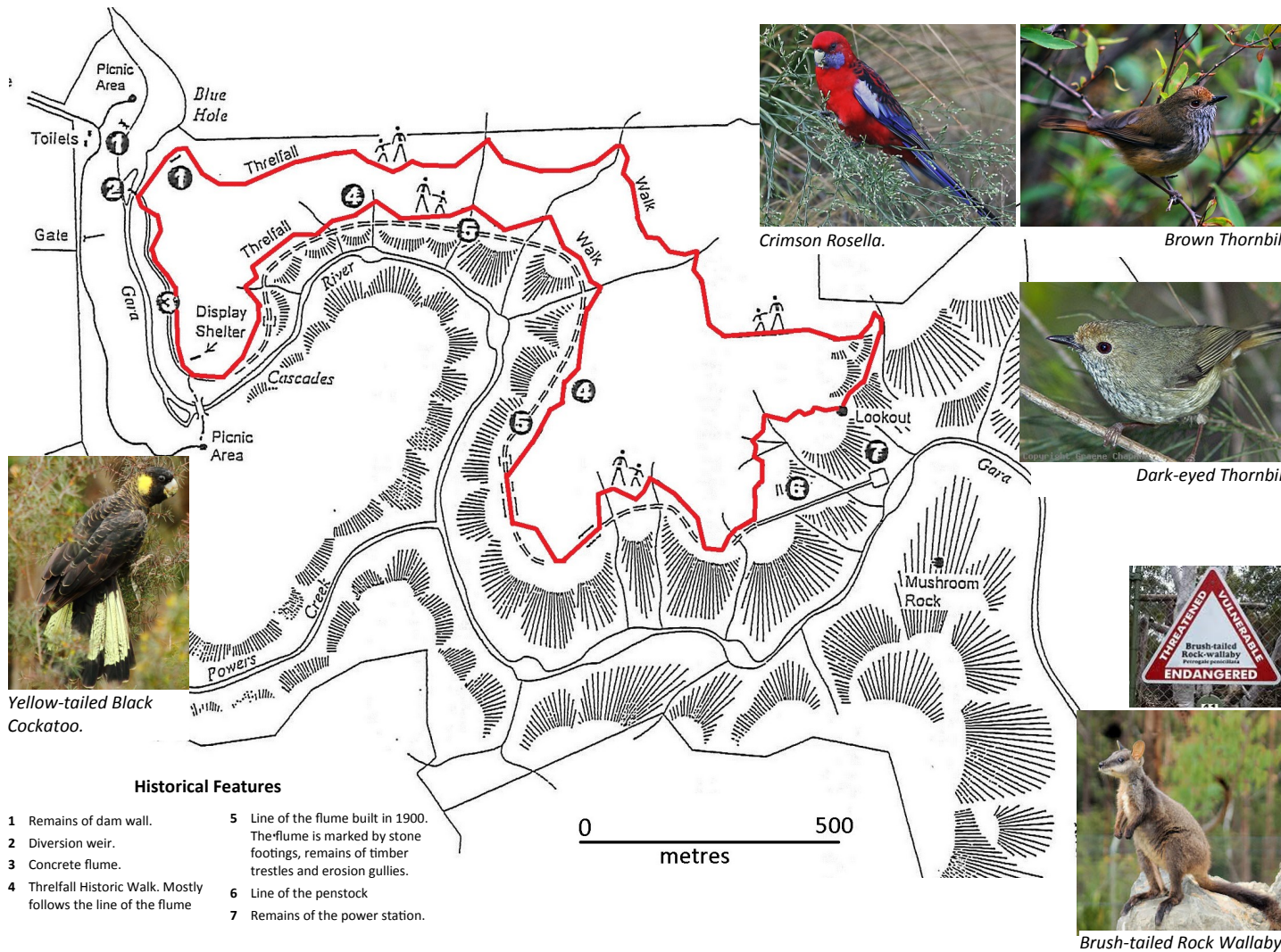


Gara Gorge

OXLEY WILD RIVERS
NATIONAL PARK



Biodiversity

Immediately upon entering the park, the visitor cannot fail to be impressed by the magnificent River She-Oaks lining the Gara River. These trees offer a food source for Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos. Away from the water, the granitic soils support many



She-Oaks lining river.

White Gums which, in turn, provide shelter and nesting sites for smaller birds, such as the startling Crimson Rosella and tiny Thornbills.

Stringybarks abound on the Threlfall Track with an unusual stand of (suckering) Bull Oaks near the gorge lookout. Sightings of Wedge-tailed Eagles and the rare Brush-tailed Rock Wallaby are not uncommon, though the granitic rocks of Gara Gorge do not suit the nesting requirements of the speedy and audacious Peregrine Falcon.



ARMIDALE

new
england
high
country

Introduction

The upper Gara Gorge, locally known as the Blue Hole (see cover picture), is located 18 km from Armidale along the Castledoyle Road. This area is a popular picnic spot and is well known for its scenic bush strolls. It is also the site of Australia's first commercial Hydroelectric Scheme.

To get there, travel east on the Waterfall Way. At the edge of the city (just past the 80 km signs), take the right-hand turn-off for Castledoyle Road and where this road turns right, travel straight ahead over the cattle grid.



Facilities

The large pool at the first picnic area is the Blue Hole. Facilities include pit toilets, picnic tables and gas BBQs within a shelter shed.

Alternatively, turn right and continue driving south towards the second picnic area where the walking tracks commence. There are lovely picnic areas, toilets and BBQs in this area.



Blue Hole picnic area.

Activities

Picnics, gorge views, photography, bird-watching, interesting walks and river exploration, even swimming, in summer, in the Blue Hole. The walking trails commence across the footbridge from the picnic ground. The track to the left (northbound - 800 m) leads to the weir and the dam remnants, plus an informative Display Board.

The track to the right is the historic **Threlfall Walk**. This pleasant 5.5 km loop walk follows the route of the water flume and culminates eastward at a lookout which oversees the remains of the power station. This walk, which is a little easier to walk clockwise, provides magnificent views of the Macleay Gorges and features an impressive 10-metre timber truss bridge.



Gara Upper Cascades.

Southwards from the lower picnic area the gorge devolves into a series of cascades. There are no designated tracks to enable downstream investigation, so visitors could explore the river-bed by rock-hopping and wading. Great care needs to be taken when doing this and it should never be undertaken when the river is high after rain.

The waters of the Gara feed into the Macleay system which exits to the sea at South West Rocks via Kempsey.

Gara Gorge Hydroelectric Scheme



Building the dam at Gara Gorge in c. 1894.

The hydroelectric scheme at Gara Gorge was the first in Australia to be brought to fruition. Construction commenced in 1894 and the plant was switched on in late February 1895. The Gara River was dammed at the Blue Hole and the water flow regulated by a weir into a flume which carried it for 2.5 km to the power station downstream. The power was fed to the booming mining town of Hillgrove, about 7 km away and thus Hillgrove became the first town in Australia to be lit and powered by hydroelectricity. The Scheme remained in operation until 1920.

Richard Threlfall, a professor at the University of Sydney, was the consultant electrical engineer for the project.



Gara water race/flume c. 1896.