Lark Quarry's landscape — Jump-Up Country

Lark Quarry Conservation Park is Jump-Up country – a landscape of mesas, gullies and steep escarpments. This dry and dramatic landscape has been created by water. Scientists call this landscape "dissected residuals" as the sediments laid down by ancient lakes and seas have been eroded over the millennia by runoff from countless storms. You can see the work of water everywhere in the landscape, the deep gullies, the eucalypts growing along the watercourses, and the flat tops of the mesas.

The flat tops are hard, chemically altered rocks known as duricrusts, laterites and silcretes, formed as deep weathering leached minerals from the rocks and deposited silica, iron oxides and some clays. Mesas around Winton, including the Merton Range and Rangelands are approximately the same height, representing the old surface some 30 - 20 million years ago.

Winter temperatures range from 6 degrees C to 23 degrees C. Summers are hot, with temperatures above 42 degrees C. Most of the annual rainfall of about 400mm falls in the summer.

The dominant vegetation is spinifex grass, with lancewood and Normonton box. Many small herbs flourish after summer rains.

Prickly **spinifex** grows from centre out - the tussocks often have an older dead centre. Spinifex tussocks efficiently hold soil from being blown away by the wind. Wallaroos find it tasty. Take care - spinifex leaves irritate the skin.

Lancewood are the tough wattles growing in shallow infertile soils on the drier hillsides. **Normanton box** are eucalypts grow on the lower slopes along waterlines. They are a mallee gum - their multiple stems reshoot after fire. Smooth-barked **snappy gums** grow beside sheltered water soaks below the escarpments.

The surrounding landscape

If you climb to the lookout on the mesa behind the trackways building, you will see Mitchell grass plains rolling away to the east. These plains have not been cleared, they are naturally grassy. The grasses grow on cracking clays that do not support strong root growth, Coolibah trees grow along the watercourses. The introduced woody weed prickly acacia is a problem in the grasslands.

To the west is the channel country and the Diamantina River. The channel country is vast and flat and crisscrossed by braided watercourses, many of which join during floods.

Wildlife

Wildlife abounds in Lark Quarry Conservation Park with over 90 species of birdlife seen here. Most animals shelter during the heat of the day, but you may see birds and lizards.

Spinifex pigeons live on seeds from spinifex and other grasses. They live in these arid lands all year round, but need access to water. On the trip out, you'll have seen groups of **black kites** roosting in trees beside the road or soaring high on the thermals. They eat carrion as well as rodents, reptiles and insects. **Rufous-crowned emu-wrens**, weigh five grams or less, nest and shelter within the spinifex. They forage for insects in the low shrubs and tussocks.

Wallaroos snooze during the day in caves under the escarpment, coming out to graze in the evening. Wallaroos have evolved in be extremely water and energy efficient in this dry landscape. They graze on spinifex, as well as herbs and grasses. **Echidnas** shelter in caves and crevices, emerging to forage for ants and termites during the cooler parts of the day. You might see **nettled dragons** sunning themselves along the tracks.

Other regional national parks

Bladensburg National Park features creeks and waterholes, Mitchell grass downs, mesas and sandstone ranges.

Diamantina National Park features floodplains, braided channels and waterholes of the Diamantina River, sandstone ranges, the Mitchell grass plains and desert dunes. 4WD access only.

Lochern National Park, on the Thompson River, features channels and waterholes, mulga lands and Mitchell grass downs. Rough roads, impassable in wet.

Lark Quarry Conservation Park and Dinosaur Trackways are jointly managed by Winton Shire Council and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. Queensland Museum provides ongoing trackways scientific advice.