Fraser Island

Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992
Fraser Island is the largest sand island in the world and has immense scientific importance. Half the world's perched freshwater dune lakes are found here and its coastal dunes are still evolving.

Nowhere else does sand support such majestic remnants of tall rainforest. Fraser Island contains an outstanding example of patterned swampy fens, and a rich diversity of plants and animals adapted to the nutrient-poor, acidic environment. The island is also home to the world's purest-bred dingos.

A mosaic of long windswept ocean beaches, coloured sand cliffs, rainforest and both crystal-clear and dark lakes, Fraser Island is an exceptionally beautiful place.

Fraser Island (K'gari) was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1992 in recognition of its outstanding natural universal values:

- as an outstanding example representing significant ongoing geological processes and biological evolution.
- as an example of superlative natural phenomena.

Stretching over 120 kilometres along the southern coast of Queensland and covering 1,840 km², it is the largest sand island in the world. A place of exceptional beauty, it is characterised by its long uninterrupted white beaches flanked by strikingly coloured sand cliffs, its majestic tall rainforests and numerous freshwater lakes of crystal clear waters.

The massive sand deposits that make up the island are a continuous record of climatic and sea level changes over the past 700,000 years.

Fraser Island features complex dune systems that are still evolving, and an array of dune lakes that is exceptional in its number, diversity and age.

The highest dunes on the island reach up to 240 metres above sea level. Forty perched dune lakes, half the number of such lakes in the world, can be found on the island. These lakes are formed when organic matter, such as leaves, bark and dead plants, gradually builds up and hardens in depressions created by the wind.

Fraser Island also has several barrage lakes, formed when moving sand dunes block a watercourse, and 'window' lakes, formed when a depression exposes part of the regional water table.

A surprising variety of vegetation types grow on the island, ranging from coastal heath to subtropical rainforests. It is the only place in the world where tall rainforests are found growing on sand dunes at elevations of over 200 metres.

The low 'wallum' heaths on the island are of particular evolutionary and ecological significance, providing magnificent wildflower displays in spring and summer.

Birds are the most abundant form of animal life on the island, with more than 350 species recorded. It is a particularly important site for migratory wading birds, which use the area as a resting place during their long flight between southern Australia and their breeding grounds in Siberia.

A species of particular interest is the endangered ground parrot, which is found in the wallum heathlands.

Few mammal species are present on the island. The most common are bats, particularly flying foxes. The dingo population on the island is regarded as the most pure strain of dingoes remaining in eastern Australia.

The unique lakes and patterned fens on Fraser Island are poor habitats for fish and other aquatic species because of the purity, acidity and low nutrient levels of the water. Some frog species are adapted to survive in this difficult environment. Appropriately called 'acid frogs', they tolerate the acidic conditions characteristic of the Fraser Island lakes and swamps.

Called K'gari by its Aboriginal inhabitants, the island reveals Aboriginal occupation of at least 5,000 years, although it is possible that further archaeological work may indicate earlier occupation. Early European reports suggested that Fraser Island was heavily populated by Aboriginal people,
but subsequent research indicates that there was a small permanent population of 400-600 that swelled seasonally to perhaps 2000-3000 in the winter months when seafood resources were particularly abundant. Fraser Island contains many sites of archaeological, social and spiritual significance. Middens, artefact scatters, fish traps, scarred trees and campsites bear witness to the lives of the original inhabitants.

European contact, initiated by Matthew Flinders in 1802, was sporadic and limited to explorers, escaped convicts and shipwreck survivors. In 1836 a number of survivors of the wrecked ship Stirling Castle lived for about six weeks on the island before being rescued. One of the survivors was Eliza Fraser, wife of the ship’s captain, after whom Europeans named the island.

Day-to-day management of Fraser Island is the responsibility of the Queensland Environmental Protection Agency.
Further information

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

www.environment.gov.au/heritage/places/world/fraser/index

UNESCO World Heritage

http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/630

Contact

Fraser Island
Fraser Island World Heritage Area
Executive Officer

Queensland Environmental Protection Agency
Southern Region
PO Box 64
Bellbowrie QLD 4070

Email: csa@epa.qld.gov.au
Tel: 07 3202 0225

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