

# DESTINATION FLINDERS RANGES SOUTH AUSTRALIA

**Upgrades at Wilpena have made this resort even more attractive as a base for exploring the grandeur of the Flinders Ranges.**

The loose gravel track climbed out of the rocky creek bed and wound its way up a steep slope. When the Land Rover's bonnet crested the rise the view literally stopped us in our tracks: as far as the eye could see the twisted, tortured hills of the Flinders Ranges stretched to the horizon, their folds accentuated by the fading rays of the sinking sun.



We were on Arkaba Station, south of Wilpena, at the time, but we could have been on one of many Flinders Ranges National Parks tracks. Even after several visits to this region we still get knocked out by the spectacular Flinders' scenery.

Our base for this visit was Wilpena Pound Resort, from where it's possible to 4WD-tour and walk through the rugged ranges. Since we last checked out the place most of the Old Wilpena Homestead buildings have been restored, giving visitors an excellent impression of Outback station life in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

There's also a newly constructed meeting place at Old Wilpena – 'Ikara' in the local Adnyamathanha people's dialect – where the traditional owners of the Flinders Ranges express the hope that visitors will reflect on the changes that white settlement brought to the area and approach the future with mutual respect.

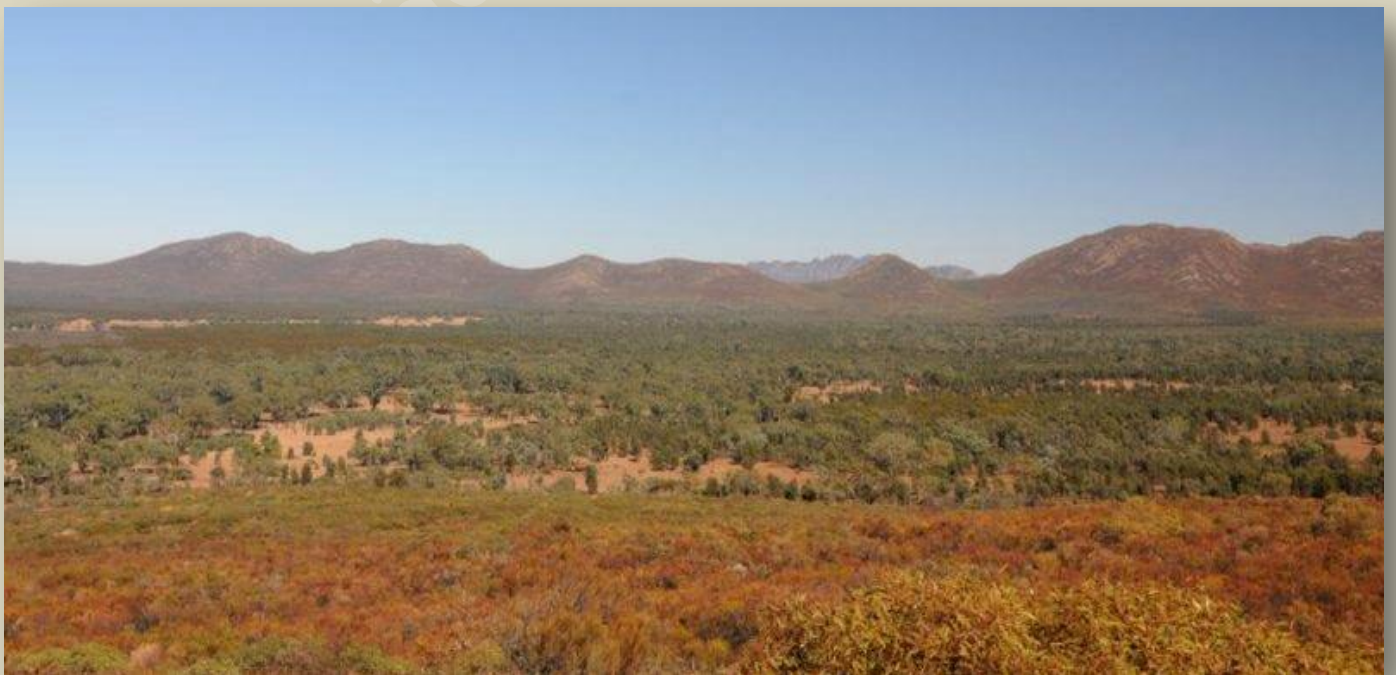


## Exploring the Wilpena Area

Wilpena Pound looks very much like the crater of an extinct volcano or a depression caused by a massive meteor strike, but is in fact the product of millions of years of geologic pressures and erosion. What we now see as nearly 500 kilometres of north-south-running mountain ranges began as deposited sediments some 1400 million years ago.

These sediments have been given nature's hard treatment, while selective erosion has left hard sandstone and quartz ridges standing out above valleys of softer materials.

In the Wilpena area the folding and erosion has created radical shapes, with bread-knife serrations along some ridges and hill sides with graduated slopes on one side and sheer drops on the other. St Mary Peak, on the eastern rim of Wilpena Pound is the highest point in the Flinders Ranges, at 1160 metres.



The Ranges seem to jump up out of the surrounding plains and inspired fascinating Aboriginal 'dreaming' stories of the origin of the mountains. One story, Yurlu's Journey, even explains the Dreamtime origins of massive coal deposits at nearby Leigh Creek. Yurlu, a Kingfisher Man, once lit a huge signal fire and the resulting charcoal is still being dug up today.



The best way to appreciate the Wilpena area is a combination of driving and bush walking. There are short walks accessible from dirt road parking areas, while the dedicated bush walker can attack the longer walks, including the Heysen and Mawson Trails.

Must dos for the moderately fit are the graded walk from Wilpena Pound Resort to the rebuilt Hill Homestead inside the Pound and the walk around the restored Old Wilpena Homestead.

One member of the Hill family, Jessie Hill, recorded some of the events at Wilpena Pound when her family was farming and running cattle inside the Pound and excerpts are displayed on panels at this site.



After walking the stretch of narrow, rocky track alongside Wilpena Creek it's difficult to imagine the Hill men building a road wide enough for wagons to negotiate. Their careful log foundation work was swept away by a flood and that was pretty much it for the Hills' ability to move produce out of the Pound.

Today the gravel roads in the Wilpena region are kept in good condition and for the most part are easily handled by softroaders. However, caution is needed at some dry creek bed crossings where large stones can threaten engine and transmission sumps. Visitors who don't want to drive their own vehicles can jump into a 4WD bus for a tour.



Arkaba Station is located 35km south of Wilpena and offers a tag-along or 4WD bus tour. This three-hour trek runs through typical Flinders' country and ends with magnificent views from McLeod Hill. It's possible to stay in posh, quiet farmhouse accommodation at Arkaba Station, but we opted for the more northerly Wilpena Pound Resort.

## Wilpena Pound Resort

The Resort offers visitors a choice of accommodation, from luxury motel units, through mid-priced rooms and back-packer cabins to a camping area with all facilities and some powered sites. There's an excellent dining room and bar area, a large pool and a visitor information centre. A general store sells essentials and there are petrol and diesel pumps on site.

It's easy to make the Resort a base and drive through the Ranges on day trips. Several walks are also close by the Resort. Wilpena is an easy five-hour drive from Adelaide.



Recently, we checked out the camping ground and found it well arranged, with some sites being 'rested' to avoid overuse. The powered site area was well patronised, as usual, but there were plenty of tree-sheltered sites away from the madding crowd. Access to the bar and dining room was graded and well-lit.



The mid-priced motel rooms were very comfortable and room servicing was good. The dining room menu and table service were first class.

## Old Wilpena

The original homestead and the out-buildings have been restored to a very high standard and walking around this area was one of the highlights of our Flinders trip.

The restoration includes much original equipment and there are plaques at each site, with explanations of each building's function. The blacksmith's forge is faithfully reproduced, complete with work pieces and tools.



The grain store, with its clever vermin-proof shelving, illustrates Outback ingenuity at its best. There are self-guided walking tours as well as organised excursions to Old Wilpena.

## Iga Warta

While in the Flinders Ranges it's worth making an overnight stop at the Aboriginal-run campgrounds at Iga Warta. This place is a showpiece, run by the Adnyamathanha – literally 'hill people'. It's easily reached, being on the mountain road between Lake Frome and Leigh Creek. The hill drive, through craggy red rocks, is a welcome change from the flat country between the Barrier Highway and Frome Downs.



The Adnyamathanha are very welcoming and often put on a fireside cultural exchange that has everyone up role playing and dancing. Iga Warta is a shining beacon for Aboriginal groups who can see the benefits of tourism and cultural exchange as a way of breaking down the barriers of race and creed.

The campground has an amenities block that puts most Outback facilities to shame and there's also a small shop that sells essentials.

## Arkaroola

No Flinders Ranges trip is complete without a visit to the multi award-winning Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary. Located 130km east of Leigh Creek, in the rugged and spectacular northern Flinders Ranges, this 610sq km, operated by the Sprigg family, contains some of Australia's most dramatic mountain views and offers several guided tours. Arkaroola is dotted with rugged hills, towering granite peaks, deep gorges and cool waterholes. If you're lucky, like we were, you may come across the endangered yellow-footed rock wallaby.

Arkaroola has plenty to keep bushwalkers and four wheel drivers busy. The best known attraction is the 4x4 Ridgetop Tour that traverses ancient seabeds and razor-back ridges and peaks. The scary road-end at Sillers Lookout thrills everyone who takes part.

Arkaroola was the first Flinders Ranges tourist operation to achieve Advanced Ecotourism accreditation and with now has eleven such tours available. A third successive Award for Ecotourism in November 2007 earned Arkaroola SA Tourism's Hall of Fame listing.

The late Dr Reg Sprigg AO and his wife, Griselda, founded what is now a world-recognised eco-tourism venture, following an amazing geological surveying career that saw the Sprigg Family regularly venturing into little-explored Outback regions.

On one of our trips to Plenty Lakes in the Northern Simpson we came across an old bottle, which held four aluminium tags, each inscribed with the name of one of the Sprigg Family. A year before we stood on the only large silcrete outcrop in the Simpson, just north of the French Line, The outcrop was discovered by Reg Sprigg in 1962 and named Geosurveys Hill, after his exploration company.

Reg Sprigg's appreciation for the Arkaroola region dated back to 1940, when he studied the area as a student of the great Antarctic explorer Sir Douglas Mawson.

Reg and Griselda Sprigg purchased Arkaroola sheep station in 1967, re-establishing native flora and fauna and transforming it into the spectacular private wilderness sanctuary that it is today.

The work they began is being carried on today by their children, Marg and Doug, who travelled many bush miles with them.

One of the relatively recent initiatives at Arkaroola is the annual Star Party DownUnder. Local Adnyamathanha man, Sharpy Coulthard, has recently returned to Arkaroola to present an Aboriginal cultural tour, *Yata Nukuntha* - 'looking at the ground'. This tour provides guests with Adnyamathanha creation stories and an overview of the traditional uses for food and medicine of Arkaroola's native vegetation.



This tour is in keeping with Arkaroola's aims to: 'preserve its geological, biological and ecological features; to support research and promote education; and to deliver practical conservation through controlled tourism'.



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for this trek

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## FACT FILE

### Where

Central South Australia

### Time required

Three days minimum

### Best time to go

April to October

Flinders Ranges National Park may be closed in times of high fire danger.

### What to do

Bushwalking, cycling, scenic drives, 4WD touring, historic pursuits, camping, scenic flights, guided tours

### Maps

HEMA Flinders Ranges

### Camping and Accommodation

National Parks provides bush-camping sites at Acraman, Aroona, Brachina East, Cambrian, Dingley Dell, Koolamon, Teamsters, and Tresona.

Privately owned Wilpena Pound Resort has a caravan park, camping area and motel style accommodation.

Public roads are accessible by two-wheel drive vehicles, caravans and trailers.

### Permits

Park entry and camping permits are required and can be obtained at self-registration stations. A separate permit is also required for Wilpena Pound.

### Track Closures

[www.parks.sa.gov.au](http://www.parks.sa.gov.au)

### Fuel

Hawker, Blinman, Wilpena Pound Resort, Leigh Creek

### Contact

Wilpena Visitor Centre

Phone: (08) 8648 0048

Wilpena Pound Resort

[www.wilpenapound.com.au/](http://www.wilpenapound.com.au/)

National Parks Guide

[www.nationalparkguide.com.au/south-australia/flinders-ranges-national-park/camping.cfm](http://www.nationalparkguide.com.au/south-australia/flinders-ranges-national-park/camping.cfm)