

THE WONDERS OF WILDLIFE
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AND AUDLEY TRAVEL

Building the future by restoring the past

Deep in the Flinders Ranges lies an amazing former sheep station that is being carefully taken back to its natural state by a conservationist with a vision, says **Hazel Plush**

Arkaba is the kind of place that gets deep under your skin. Take just one walk through its red gum forests – in the footprints of wild kangaroos – and you'll be utterly enchanted, the friendliness of local people and you'll feel welcome. Spend one starlit night under the watchful gaze of its mountains, and it will stay in your dreams for ever. At least, that's how it was for Charlie Carlow – the man who brought it back to life.

"You only have to stand on top of the ranges to realise what a special place it is," says Carlow, of the views that encompass Wilpena Pound in one direction and the Lake Torrens salt pans in the other. But in 2009, when Carlow – Arkaba's owner, though "guardian" feels more appropriate – first glimpsed the land, it was a scrubby, struggling mess.

For 150 years, Arkaba's 60,000 acres had served as sheep grazing pasture, an endeavour that decimated the land's water supply and destroyed its indigenous plants. Feral cats and foxes tore through the local wildlife, killing untold numbers of local birds and marsupials, and driving the yellow-footed rock wallabies (which were also hunted for pelts) to the edge of extinction.

When he first visited, Carlow was looking for a site for a new conservation tourism project – and Arkaba was screaming out for a saviour. "Australia has the dubious distinction of having the highest mammal extinction rate in the world," says Carlow, who saw the potential immediately. A number of species are on the brink too. We have a responsibility to look after the environment in every sense."

Work started in 2010. Carlow's team removed the livestock and began reducing the numbers of goats, foxes and cats. The terrain was barren and strangled by invasive weeds, so the patrol protected the water sources



Conservation king Flinders Ranges, right, emus at Arkaba, above, which is run by Charlie Carlow, top

and cut back vegetation. The land could breathe again at last. On an area of this size – around 30,000 football pitches – the scale of the project is staggering, but its impact on the area has been equally vast.

"Since 2010 we've removed 360 foxes, which equates to saving the lives of 1,793,714 small mammals," says Carlow. "With 2,605 goats removed, we have rescued 5.5 million kilos of vegetation from their indiscriminate grazing, and conserved more than 11.6 million litres of water."

Arkaba's endemic wildlife is now abundant, with wallaroos and red and western grey kangaroos commonly sighted once more. Rarer marsupials have made their homes here too: tiny western quolls and fat-tailed dunnarts can be spotted snuffling through the

undergrowth, while gangly legged emus roam the plains.

But for Carlow, the ultimate reward was the yellow-footed rock wallabies' return to the ranges: "I think the impact of our efforts became clear to me when we counted two colonies on the Elder Range, and photographed a mother and joey on the edge of Wilpena Pound. That's when it finally sank in."

But really, the work was just beginning. As the wildlife blossomed, Carlow also created a plush homestead in the heart of Arkaba – "proudly without Wi-Fi, telephones, televisions, minibars or any of the typical features of a hotel to distract". With space for just 10 guests at a time, the conservancy now offers an immersive mix of bush walks, 4x4 safaris, birding and photography – as well as the chance to help with conservation.

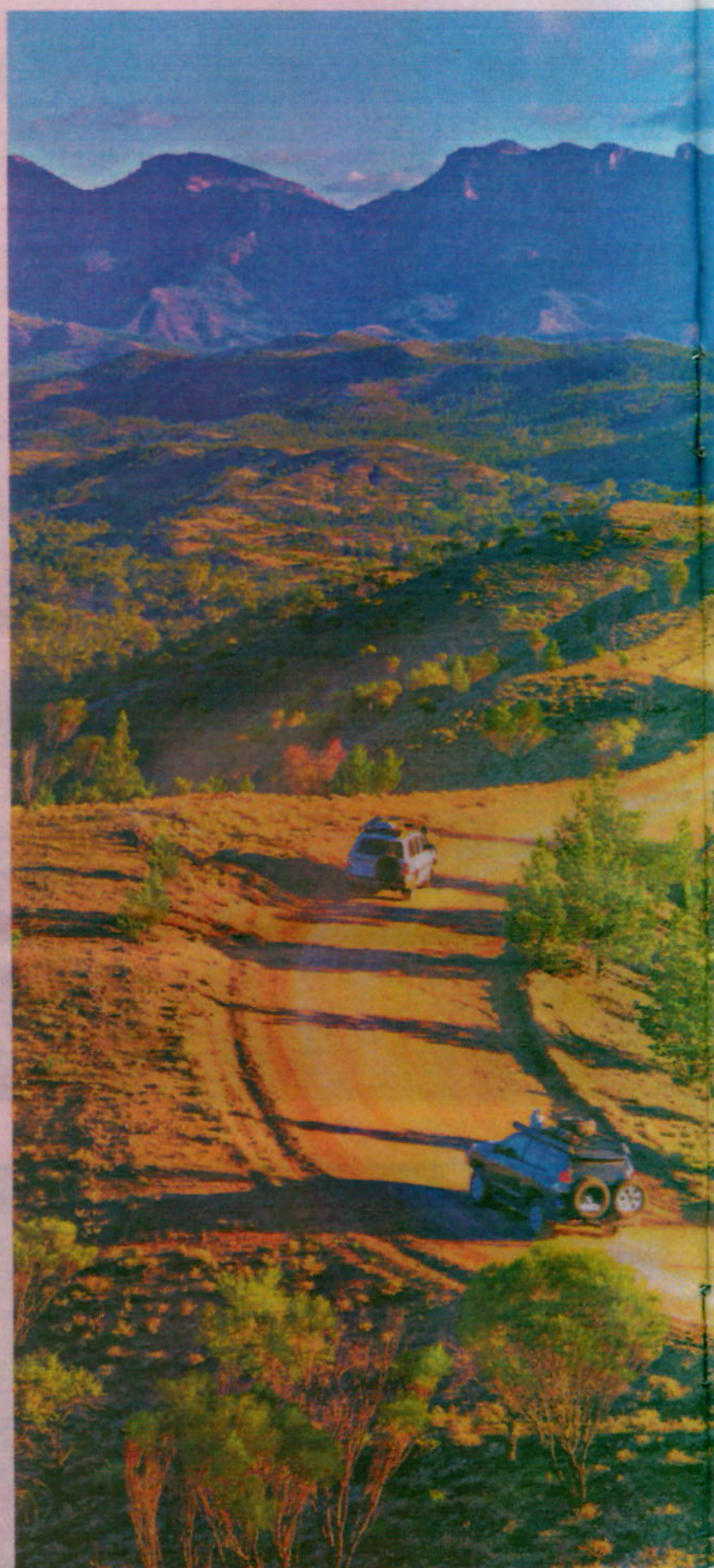
"It's all very well viewing wildlife and ticking it off your list, but that's superficial if you don't know the story behind it," says Carlow – who modelled Arkaba's activities on those of African safari reserves. Guests might spend their days helping biologists survey the land, setting up camera traps, or tracking radio-collared feral cats – it all helps.

"You're not only coming as a spectator – you're actually participating," says Brendon Bevan, who manages Arkaba's team. "You're making a contribution to us, helping in this transition that's happening right before your eyes."

And the benefits work both ways: "It's interesting to see a change in people while they spend time out in nature," continues Bevan. "They visibly relax: it's a holistic experience."

After its own resurrection, Arkaba – which means "land of abundance" in local Aboriginal dialect – has the power to bring you to life too.

arkabaconservancy.com



WHERE TO STAY IN THE FLINDERS RANGES AND OUTBACK SOUTH AUSTRALIA

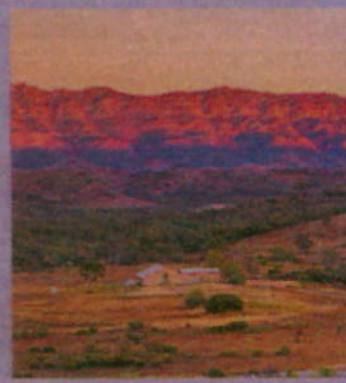
KANGALUNA CAMP, GAWLER RANGES

Eco-friendly yet utterly stylish, this handful of safari tents offers the finest night's sleep in the Gawler Ranges. The camp is a haven for bird watching, and has been designed to have minimum impact on its spectacular surroundings.
gawlerangessafaris.com



ARKABA HOMESTEAD

Arkaba is one of the most exclusive stays in Australia. Just 10 guests at a time share this remote private wildlife sanctuary in an elegant 1850s homestead, its 60,000 acres packed with native species. As well as kangaroo and emu watching, you can team up your stay with a glamping trek.
arkabastation.com



RAWNSLEY PARK STATION, FLINDERS RANGES

Rawnsley's eco villas feel like a home from home – but with a few memorable extras. You'll love the Wilpena Pound views, garden verandah (perfect for barbecues), and the retractable ceiling for stargazing from your bed.
rawnsleypark.com.au



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FIVE UNFORGETTABLE
OUTBACK ADVENTURES

DRIVE THE TRAIL
IN A 4X4

With its crowd-free highways and jaw-dropping scenery, the Outback makes for an invigorating driving adventure. Head to the Gawler Ranges, north-west of Adelaide, where you can take a thrilling four-wheel-drive trek through desert, eucalypt woodland, gorges and seasonal waterfalls. With Gawler Ranges Wilderness Safaris you can head to the non-public area of the park in a four-wheel drive, where more than 100 species of birds live among kangaroos, emus and wombats. And don't miss stunning Lake Gairdner, a huge salt lake that will live long in the memory.

FLY OVER THE
BIG COUNTRY

HIKE THROUGH
THE WILDERNESS

To understand the majesty of South Australia's Outback you need to see it from the sky. Up there, those saw-toothed ridges and sprawling plains are put into perspective: you knew the Outback was big

- but this big? Far below, tiny kangaroos skitter between scrub bushes and thirsty creek beds stretch out like paths. The Ghan railway line, Lake Eyre and Wilpena Pound's are spectacular from the air.

It might seem crazy to explore this larger-than-life landscape on foot, but hiking connects you to the Outback in a way that driving or cycling never could. With the slow pace of walking, your body will

adjust to the subtlest details: the crunch of dry earth, the medley of animal tracks and the whisper of the wind in the gum trees. It's invigorating. Always hike with a guide who knows the terrain inside out.

BIKE ACROSS THE
BUSHLAND

TAKE A SLOW
CAMEL TRAIN

IKARA SAFARI CAMP,
WILPENA POUND

A luxurious retreat in the heart of South Australia's prime wilderness, Ikara's tents boast modern en-suite bathrooms and sumptuous king beds. Soak up the sunset from your private deck and toast marshmallows in the fire pit.

wilpenapound.com.au



The Mawson Cycling Trail stretches 560 miles from Adelaide to the town of Blinman, through wild bushlands and over mountains - no mean feat, even for experienced cyclists. However, the route

can be divided into thrilling day trips and weekend jaunts. Visit the bike hire website for information on tackling the Mawson Trail or the biannual Outback Odyssey cycling event. bikesa.asn.au

With their strong legs and built-in food supply (those humps aren't just for decoration, you know), camels make light work of the Outback's challenging terrain. They were introduced in the 1800s to

support expeditions and although their services are largely redundant today, there's still something magical about crossing the wilderness on a "ship of the desert". cameltreksaustralia.com.au