

DESTINATION

WILPENA POUND |

31.5590° S, 138.5740° E

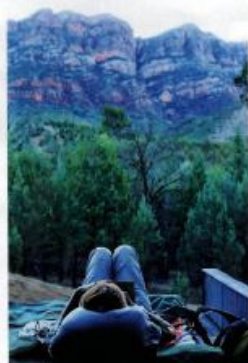
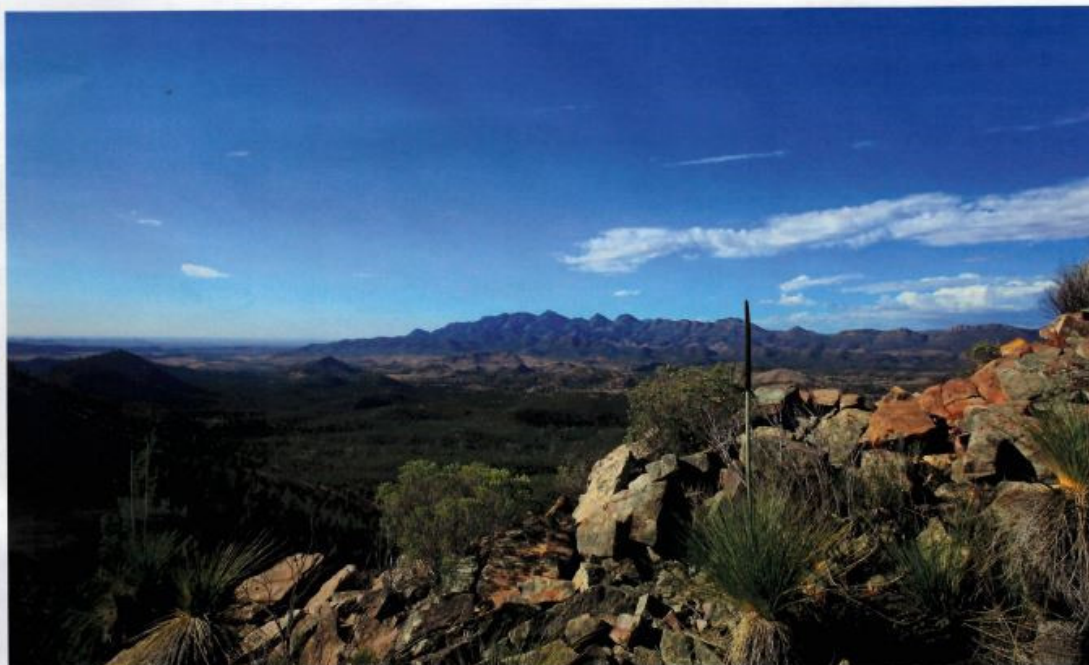


POPULATION
Variable, mostly tourists

SPOKEN LANGUAGES
English

CURRENCY
Australian dollar

TIME ZONE
ACST (GMT + 9.30)



It's just after sunrise as I awaken to a spectacular view of the Flinders Ranges – an unusual start for a city dweller like me. A cup of tea is delivered to my bedside and I watch from my swag as the Elder Range slowly comes alive with a gentle warm glow. There's no place I'd rather be right now.

The sheer scale of the southern outback is on show at the quintessentially Australian Arkaba Station, located 425 kilometres north of Adelaide. The former sheep station, situated at the southern edge of the Flinders Ranges National Park, serves as the base for our four-day walking safari. Owned and operated by Wild Bush Luxury,

the 1850s heritage homestead is set on 24,000 wild hectares.

Over morning tea at the homestead, we're briefed on the walk and meet the rest of the group. Maps are viewed, routes and terrain discussed and our all-important daypacks are filled with essentials, including a 2.5 litre water bladder and food supplies.

"Does anyone want a thermos of tea or coffee?" shouts the chef from the kitchen. Great idea, I think – until I feel the weight of my pack. I decide against it.

It's a short drive to Wilpena Pound National Park, where our safari will begin. We set off on foot, and it's not long before we're perched high on a rock with a magnificent

EYES WIDE OPEN

A WALKING ODYSSEY BECKONS **PETER BRAIG** AND **VANESSA STEELE** IN THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK.

PHOTO: PETER DODDS



view of the Pound in front of us. Kat, our guide, points out our 12 kilometre trail ahead and the mountain range where we will make our descent into Black Gap camp, for our first night under the stars.

You don't have to be super fit to enjoy this walking holiday but I, for one, am glad to see our camp already set up when we arrive in the late afternoon. Home-made lemonade is served and cool towels are handed out. Bush showers are set and ready to go. It feels great to take off my hiking boots and relax in the evening light with a glass of wine. The chef informs us that dinner will be served at dusk; the table is already set with lanterns.

After a good night's sleep and a nourishing breakfast, we have a 14 kilometre hike ahead of us. Today's walk will be a little more challenging through rocky creek beds and broken country before we reach the second night's stop at Elder camp. Not that we need to worry, as the pace will remain unhurried, giving us plenty of time to rest, take photographs or

observe the prolific birdlife. We follow the Heysen Trail through Black Gap and onto rolling hills that were once used for farming sheep.

I quiz Kat on the numerous plant varieties we pass. With a keen eye and binoculars ever at the ready, she spots most of the wildlife on the trek – emus, grey kangaroos and euros (wallaroos), wedge-tailed eagles, mulga parrots, red-capped robins, orb weaver spider webs, lots of skinks and the shy central bearded dragon.

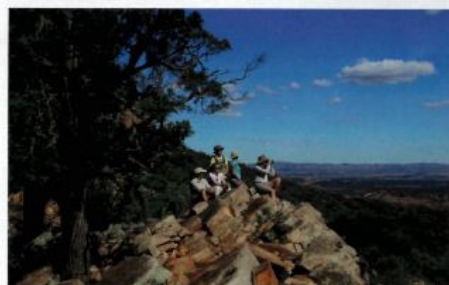
On day three, we wind our way through beautiful stands of native cypress pine trees and traverse mature mallee forests before ascending the Red Range to take in the vista. We stop for lunch at the peak where the view is staggering and encapsulates the magic of the area.

We all feel a sense of achievement as we look back and see the terrain we've covered. From there we navigate dry creek beds and open country and finally descend to Arkaba Homestead.

Back at the homestead, life is as it should be, and we are welcomed by station manager



CLOCKWISE FROM OPPOSITE, BELOW: A well-earned rest in the South Australian outback; looking into Wilpena Pound on day two; Arkaba Station (top); table set for dinner; day two of the Arkaba Walk follows the Heysen Trail; tea break at Bridle Gap, looking out from the rim of Wilpena Pound; plotting the route on day two; an ants' nest.



Brendan Bevan and shown to our rooms. Very comfortable they are, too, but will I be able to drift off to sleep with not a star in sight? But now, it's time to freshen up for canapés and prepare for a three-course dinner with matching local wines for our final night in the outback.

On the drive back to Adelaide, I spy river red gums and marvel at the ancient rock formations. Kat's expert commentary springs to mind and I know the knowledge she so generously imparted over the last few days will stay with me

forever. It's the perfect end to an eye-opening outback experience.

The writer and photographer were guests of Wild Bush Luxury. The four-day, three-night walk starts at \$2150 per person. See wildbushluxury.com or email info@wildbushluxury.com.

Leading Australian travel photographer and author of the Lonely Planet's Guide to Travel Photography, Richard I'Anson, will host a luxury photographic retreat at Arkaba Station from October 3 to 7. Ten places are available on the four-night/four-day retreat; \$2895 pp based on twin share. The exclusive tour follows the sell-out success of I'Anson's first photographic retreat at Arkaba in October 2012.