

A 200km mountain biking adventure! What a unique way to experience the geological, cultural, environmental, and biodiverse beauty of this ancient landscape!

The Flinders Ranges Bike Loop passes through [Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park](#), Rawnsley Park Station, Willow Springs Station, and Gum Creek Station. Traditional lands to the Adnyamathanha people, adventurers are prohibited from doing this trail solo due to the isolation – and associated dangers – of this remote area. You can cycle in a group of three, although I think the best way to enjoy the [Flinders Ranges By Bike](#) (FRBB) is to join a group tour.

It's thumbs-up from me with Rawnsley Bluff in the background.

The trail includes a mixture of fire trails, station tracks, single trails, occasional public dirt roads, and a short distance on the bitumen. The natural terrain alternates between smooth pedalling, rugged efforts, technical descending, heart-raising climbing, and challenging creek crossings.

The adventure incorporates points of interest that include Wilpena Pound, Brachina Gorge, Rawnsley Bluff, Pugilist Hill Lookout, Skull Rock, Guide Hut, Appealinna Ruins, Bunyerroo Valley, Sacred Canyon, and many more.

The view towards Wilpena Pound from Pugilist Hill.

I opted to experience the FRBB with a local SA business, [Escapegoat Adventures](#). They offer guided and supported 6-day trips for a minimum of four people (and a max of ten).

Escapegoat includes:

- Return transport to the Flinders Ranges from Adelaide, including transporting bikes and equipment
- The organisation of Outback accommodation in the Willow Springs Shearers Quarters
- All meals, except lunch on the first and last day, and dinner on the final evening (which is at the pub!)
- A qualified mountain bike guide for the duration of the FRBB, as well as the final day ride in the iconic mountain biking town of [Melrose](#)
- Vehicle support and transfers to and from the FRBB each day

What's not included:


- Mountain bike – bike hire including hardtails, dual suspension bikes, and e-bikes is available
- Helmet, riding equipment (eg. [hydration pack](#)), bike spares – more advice on this below
- Travel arrangements to and from Adelaide pickup/drop off point
- Insurance – more advice on this below
- Bike repairs, spare parts etc
- Any alcohol or drinks – a limited amount of wine is supplied with dinner
- Extra [snacks](#) and/or [energy bars](#) for riding
- Personal spending money

 The Escapegoat van and bike trailer was our transport and transfer vehicle.

Riding Proficiency

Anyone considering the Flinders Ranges By Bike loop is encouraged to have *intermediate-level* mountain biking experience. The Flinders Ranges is a pretty unforgiving landscape regardless of how you choose to explore – on foot, by car, or by bike. The FRBB trail involves numerous technical sections with loose rock, rutted trails, and creek crossings. Naturally, your skills will develop throughout the journey and there is plenty of time to take each obstacle at your own pace.

What you can't catch up on once you begin the FRBB is your level of physical bike fitness. Your preparation and training should involve more than just turning the legs over, but also becoming accustomed to riding on natural undulating trails, for extended distances, for multiple days. This ensures that your butt, joints and muscle groups are all ready to handle whatever the Outback terrain throws at you!

 Some of the terrain is pretty technical, so you should do some preparation and training before tackling the trail.

Bikes & Equipment

You'll need a reliable mountain bike that is set up for the adventure, and is well maintained. Whether riding your own bike, or borrowing/hiring one, have the bike serviced prior to leaving home and ensure everything is in good working order.

The type of bike you use – hardtail, dual suspension, or e-bike – and how you set it up, will very much depend on personal preference.

I rode my own, which is a Specialized Stumpjumper 27.5 dual suspension trail bike. I knowingly sacrificed a bit on the geometry efficiency, and ran 2.6 inch wide grippy tyres to get as much rigidity, purchase, and protection on the terrain as I could.

 My Specialized Stumpjumper 27.5 mountain bike.

Our guide carried some basics – multi-tool, pump etc. as well as spares and emergency equipment – first aid kit, UHF radios, PLB etc.

It is your responsibility to carry spare tubes, brake pads, and any other gear specifically for your bike, such as spares, tools, and parts.

Items I supplied and carried:

- Hydration bladder
- Water bottle
- GPS watch
- Map – Day 1 in Green, Day 2 in Red, Day 3 in Blue, and Day 4 in Yellow (Source: FRBB)
- Helmet
- Gloves

- UHF radio
- Spare tube
- Pump
- Other miscellaneous bike spare bits and pieces
- Multi-tool
- First aid kit
- Sunscreen
- Chafing cream
- Spray jacket
- GoPro
- Lunch and snacks



My personal collection of spare gear.

Day 1 - Travel from Adelaide to the Flinders Ranges

After pickups across Adelaide, we headed north out of the city in the Escapegoat van. Our first stop was at the infamous Stone Hut Bakery, along the Horrocks Highway, known for their special 'outback' pies.

Passing through the iconic towns of Quorn and Hawker, we arrived at Willow Springs Station by mid-afternoon. The station Shearer's Quarters was our 'base camp' for the week, and the remainder of the afternoon was dedicated to getting our bikes all set up and checked, along with organising our gear for the coming days.



The famous pies from Stone Hut Bakery!

Day 2 - Rawnsley Park Station to Wilpena, and then to Willow Springs Station - 55km

Escapegoat reworks the FRBB sections to equalise each day of riding to approximately 50km. So, as part of the effort to keep to the day's quota, we were shuttled in the early morning chill from our base camp, to Rawnsley Park Station, where we began the day's ride. Leaving Rawnsley Park Station we were faced with some technical trails and creek crossings at the base of Rawnsley Bluff.

We then rode along the bitumen of Flinders Ranges Way, with Wilpena Pound to our left, until reaching the Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park boundary. Upon entering the Park, we joined up with the Mawson Trail, for a long and super fun flowy descent to the Wilpena Road. Then, cutting across the highway to the Sacred Canyon dirt road, we rejoined the Flinders Ranges By Bike trail and headed north.

The next section was a pedal through native pines where we dodged a few emus, and then continued up along the Bunyeroo Valley Scenic Drive. Lunch was at a high point on the Scenic Drive, with a view of Wilpena Pound from the northeast.

After lunch came a flogging climb up Old Blinman Rd! This historical track rejoins Flinders Ranges Way, which connects to the Appealinna Ruins, and then finishes with a descent into Willow Springs Station.



Riding through Rawnsley Park Station.

Day 3 - Willow Springs to Gum Creek - 50km

We left the Shearer's Quarters and climbed out of Willow Creek Station on a technical, loose, rock track. Upon reaching the saddle, we were rewarded with stunning views of the Bunker Ranges, before descending along station tracks towards Skull Rock.

We then cruised along the Pantapinna Track, riding alongside a few, big red kangaroos, and passing National Park Bounce Back rehabilitation sites. After stopping for lunch at the recently refurbished Guide Hut, we continued past Yalpipena Spring and Cousins Hut, and through a beautiful pass, before descending into Gum Creek Station.

Escapegoat's vehicle transfer collected us from Gum Creek Station, and we opted to drive the extra 10km north to rehydrate at the North Blinman 'Pub in the Scrub'.

That evening we were treated to a beautifully clear and balmy night, where the Outback sky of the Flinders Ranges put on a spectacular display!



The recently refurbished Guide Hut.

Day 4 - Gum Creek to Wilpena - 59km

Day 4 began with some tricky terrain through the Gum Creek station, before rejoining the Mawson Trail in Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park. This was a day filled with extraordinary vistas as we rode flowy descents and navigated the occasional creek crossing.

We pedalled along the [Brachina Gorge Geological Trail](#) for a little bit where, if needed, there are toilets available at the [Trezona Campground](#). While we didn't make the stop, there is the opportunity for those interested in geology to see the only Golden Spike in the Southern Hemisphere. This is a geological marker that defines the base of the Ediacaran Period.

Lunch was at Bunyeroo Valley Lookout, before continuing on to Razorback Lookout. This was followed by a steep descent down and through the stunning Bunyeroo Gorge, and then we began a relentless 16km incline to Wilpena Pound. About halfway along the climb is Wilocra Campground, with toilets if needed.

Around 3km from finishing, you pass Old Wilpena Station, and then it's a fun single trail to the Wilpena Village/General Store, where we were met by our Escapegoat van for the drive back to Willow Springs.



Our Base Camp for the week at the Willow Spring's Shearer's Quarters.

Day 5 - Wilpena to Rawsley via Sacred Canyon - 44km

Our final day began just outside Wilpena Village at the Cazneaux Tree. The majority of this day's ride was along rarely used dirt roads and station tracks. I've never seen so many red kangaroos at once – riding alongside, or dodging them, as they shot across the trail, that was a highlight!

The climb up to Pugilist Hill Lookout was a decent effort, with the final pinch being the steepest we had faced all week. The push was absolutely worth it for the views across Rawnsley Bluff and Wilpena Pound. From the lookout, we were blessed with a tailwind, as we rolled ourselves back into Rawnsley Park Station to complete the FRBB adventure.

On top of Pugilist Hill and enjoying the views across Rawnsley Bluff and Wilpena Pound.
A shorter day meant an earlier finish, so we buzzed down to Hawker and grabbed lunch from the local food institution – [Flinders Food Co.](#) It was then into the mountain biking town of Melrose where we spent the night at [Under The Mount](#) – accommodation that has been purpose-built for mountain bikers!

For some pain-inducing fun (and because 200km clearly wasn't enough), I decided to join the Over The Edge Bike Shop Ride out to Willowie Forest, before returning for our final dinner together at the Mt Remarkable Pub.

At Razorback Lookout before descending into Bunyeroo Gorge.

Day 6 - Melrose and returning to Adelaide

Before heading back to Adelaide, we grabbed the chance to experience some of the best mountain bike single trails in South Australia – the popular, *Dodging Bullets*, is my personal favourite! Our ride finished at [Over the Edge](#), where I grabbed a coffee and one of their delicious chocolate raspberry brownies. It was then time to load up the van and begin the journey back to Adelaide.

You don't have to be a Geologist to marvel over the formations of Skull Rock.
Throughout the five days of cycling, I suffered splits in both my front and rear tyres. While my tyres were new, in good condition, and I had them at an appropriate pressure... such is the nature of the rocky landscape, and a bit of bad luck!

Fortunately, I was able to plug both tyres and reseal them, but in hindsight, adding a spare tyre to that list above would have been a good idea considering the landscape.

Luckily I could fix my tyre splits when they happened but next time I'd carry a spare.

Safety & Insurance

It's important to remember that there is always a level of risk when mountain biking. Depending on your circumstances, I would recommend taking out travel and/or accident and injury insurance.

At the very least, it is recommended that you join a local cycling organisation, such as [AusCycling](#) (previously Mountain Bike Australia), or [BikeSA](#). These organisations provide their members with cover for injuries that may occur whilst riding.

Finding Your Way

In theory, there are supposed to be FRBB signs at every junction, and roughly every kilometre. A confident ability to navigate through remote areas is just one of the many skills

you'll need if you plan to take on the loop without a guide. Utilise the [FRBB website](#), which provides critical information on trail fees, safety, conditions of use, communications, trail maps, etc.

For me, leaning on Ian and Andy from [Escapegoat](#) made the most sense. They helped navigate the unreliability of trail signposts, and the ever-changing environment of the Flinders Ranges. They also provided backend support with meals, accommodation, and transfers. It allowed me to focus on doing what I set out to do... ride my bike, and enjoy doing it along the FRBB.

Coverage

Mobile coverage throughout the northern Flinders Ranges is limited! Hawker is the last town you will pass through with coverage. It is possible to get Telstra and Optus when brief stops are made at Rawnsley Park Station, Wilpena, and Blinman.

At our Willow Springs accommodation, there was basic free Wi-Fi internet available when near the camp kitchen. Plus laundry facilities for giving underwear and t-shirts a quick handwash, or rinsing off your bike at the end of the day.

Having fresh clothes for the next day's ride helps give momentum.

Summary

After 4 days, 205km, and 2,225 vertical metres of mountain bike riding, it was a pretty surreal feeling to roll into Rawnsley Park Station and complete the Flinders Ranges by Bike loop.

It was certainly the adventure I had hoped it to be! The experience with [Escapegoat](#) allowed me to simply enjoy riding my bike in a landscape that I have visited numerous times, but never experienced in such an authentic and raw way.

The unique, rugged, and empowering vastness of the Flinders Ranges is what makes it so iconic, and this adventure was no different. Thankfully, I managed to stay upright and physically unscathed throughout. Mentally I felt refreshed and energised, and I am so grateful to have had this opportunity.