

Following the devastating bushfires throughout the summer of 2019–20, the [Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail](#) was decimated as the fronts ripped through the western end of the island. Infrastructure from signage posts all the way through to campsite amenities were damaged or destroyed.

For those who have had the opportunity to walk the trail prior to that horrific summer, you would know how important it is to the local community. In the first step towards recovery and the trail being rebuilt, South Australia's [National Parks and Wildlife Service](#) has reopened a modified [Fire Recovery Experience](#) to walkers. This access gives people the opportunity to experience the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail in a way like never before.

 *Cape du Couedic Lighthouse.*

These unique circumstances enabled me to do what I'm passionate about. I strive to create opportunities for young people that allow them to push themselves outside their comfort zone. To learn through individual and collective adventure-based experiences and expand upon their capabilities.

A landscape where the wilderness is regenerating provides the means to achieve this purpose in the most effective way. Regrowth creates a sense of optimism and hope, and the sight of our iconic Australian bush bouncing back with fresh regrowth is inspiring. As are the views rarely seen due to the previous dense vegetation and native wildlife reclaiming their habitats.

To experience the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail from this new perspective with a group of young people who had never had the chance to undertake a trip like this before, was an immense privilege.

We chose to book our experience through [Big Heart Adventures](#) who provided a fully supported experience including transportation, ferry fees, park passes, accommodation with [Western KI Caravan Park](#), trail drop-off and pick-up each day, and confidently guided our group along the trail.


 *I'm passionate about creating opportunities like this for young people.*

What to expect

Similar to the original Wilderness Trail route, the full Fire Recovery Experience takes 5-days and continues to pass the Rocky River, the wild Southern Ocean, Cape du Couedic Lighthouse and Remarkable Rocks.

While elements of the trail have dramatically changed, some are still very much the same. The towering cliffs of limestone and coagulated magma, storm-blasted coastal scrub and massive arcs of white beaches are all still there. This is a trail for everyone, as it offers a diverse landscape that you can immerse yourself in. There's plenty of rough and rocky surfaces to walk over without having to navigate too many climbs, and an abundance of flora and fauna to appreciate.

What makes this experience particularly special, is that it is one of those unique and all-consuming places in the world that encourages inner stillness, listening and awareness.

 *Footwear cleaning stations have been re-established to help stop the spread of weeds post bushfires.*



Fees

1. To support rehabilitation after the bushfires, the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail is only open to walkers doing the Fire Recovery Experience.
2. All bookings must be made through a licensed tour operator and [Sealink](#) ferry fees, park fees and accommodation fees are usually included within their tour cost. This [FAQ page](#) is a great resource for more information.

Fitness

1. The Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail is categorised as a Grade 4 walking trail under the Australian Walking Track Grading System.
2. Our group got away with a minimal level of fitness, however, we all agree that better fitness would have enhanced our experience.
3. While there are no major climbs, there are some inclines and long days on the trail.
4. As the trail rehabilitates, it will take a toll on feet, ankles and knees. Some may want the support of [hiking poles](#).
5. I would encourage you to prepare for this hike, as the more you put in, the more you'll get out of the experience.

Weather

1. Kangaroo Island is rugged and exposed. Part of its raw beauty is the wild and elemental conditions. When on the trail, you are vulnerable to whatever Mother Nature chooses to throw.
2. The months from November through to May are the most favourable.
3. Our experience was in April and I was incredibly impressed with the resilience of our group as they faced all four seasons over 5-days!

We lost sleep due to loud *angry* downpours and walked into sideways rain. Strong winds tried to push us off course and then there were moments of warm sunshine with stunning sunrises and sunsets. Almost every meteorological term was used throughout our trip to describe the weather we experienced.



Inland from Remarkable Rocks.

Services and support

Major changes since the bushfires that are currently in place include:

1. You must organise your walk with a Commercial Tour Operator (CTO) during this recovery

phase to preserve the wilderness experience for everyone and to ensure sustainable management and rehabilitation of the trail.

2. Camping is not currently available along the trail, which means you'll need to be transferred to and from each section in a vehicle and nightly accommodation away from the trail is required.
3. The drop-off point is the same location as each day's pick-up point.
4. For the adventurers who crave the opportunity to stay out in the wilderness for the duration of the trail, we heard whispers on plans to have the trail campsites reestablished by April 2022.

Navigation

Trail markers and signage were destroyed in the bushfire and although work has begun to get this re-establish, navigation is difficult. Even more so if you have never walked the trail before. Notable points are:

1. Our CTO was invaluable as we were able to lean on his experience and knowledge for following the correct route each day.
2. A selection of downloadable navigation files in different formats are available from [Data SA](#).

Equipment

With overnight/multi-day experiences not currently available, we didn't have the need to carry extensive amounts of equipment. To make our experience more enjoyable though, we collectively agreed upon three essentials:

1. Quality [footwear](#) with plenty of support and traction. Sections two and three entail kilometres of walking over eroded limestone that's been buffed smooth by the elements and decent shoes are necessary.
2. [Hydration pack](#). Ensure you have the means to carry enough water for the day's conditions as there are no tanks out on the trail.
3. [Wind & rain jacket](#). The weather can be wild, and the wind can really pick up, especially when traversing the exposed coastlines. It's certainly worth having a wind-proof jacket in your backpack.




The trail along the Rocky River.

Day 1 - Rocky River to Snake Lagoon

Our first day began with an early departure from Adelaide to catch the Cape Jervis to Penneshaw ferry. After grabbing a few supplies from town, we headed to the western side of the island and dropped our bags off at our accommodation. We then began the afternoon's

walk near the footprint of what was the former Visitor Centre by Rocky River. With intermittent showers falling, we moved west towards the coast and through regenerating mallee scrub and eucalypt woodland. The evident wildflowers and birdlife were testaments to nature's resilience.

Reaching the Rocky River cascades was a perfect spot to take a quick snack break. While there was water around, the volume was not enough for the cascades to be flowing, but it was still a stunning sight. Towards the end of this section, the trail scoots around Snake Lagoon where we were lucky enough to spot an echidna! There is a transportable toilet in the car park here which is also the pick-up point for returning to your accommodation. Section 1 remains relatively unchanged from the pre-bushfire Wilderness Trail and a terrific breakdown of each day can be found [here](#).


 *With the lighthouse far off in the distance, we walked along the clifftop at Maupertuis Bay.*

Day 2 - Snake Lagoon to Cape du Couedic

Following on from Day 1, the trail continues along the Rocky River towards the Southern Ocean. We decided to take the 2km return side trip all the way down to the mouth which, despite the persistent rain, was a beautiful spot for a moment of both appreciation and reflection.

Once back on the main trail, the terrain changes dramatically as you move up onto the clifftop, where the eroding limestone makes it feel like you are walking on the moon. This is one spot where you will want [footwear with good traction](#).

The next point of interest is reaching Maupertuis Bay where you head down onto the white beach below. Our group certainly found this sandy stretch the most challenging of the entire trail and lunch within the shelter of some caves at the southern end of the beach was well-earned.

 *What a sight! Watching the sun set through the Admirals Arch.*

Following lunch, we started winding our way back up onto the clifftop, and towards the Cape du Couedic Lighthouse. The second half of the day continues to meander along the coastline, moving from the undulating rock to a fire trail before finishing at Admirals Arch.

Section 2 has also remained relatively unchanged since before the bushfires, except it currently finishes at Admiral's Arch where toilets are available. After nearly 9 hours of walking and covering just over 20km, it was the biggest delight to be in the company of New Zealand Fur Seals while watching the sunset through the Arch.

 *The scrub regrowth over Yacca Flat was incredible to witness.*

Day 3 - Weirs Cove to Sanderson Bay

The drop-off point is at the Lighthouse Keeper's Cottages and this section of the trail entails a slight re-route at the start but like the first couple of days, the remainder is relatively unchanged.

There are beautiful views and the first glimpse of Remarkable Rocks in the distance. Upon reaching the storehouse ruins, the trail heads inland through the scrub and over sand dunes where there's the welcome sight of towering flower spikes across Yacca Flat. Some are well

over 6m tall and it's amazing to see so much growth a mere 18-months after such destruction.

Remarkable Rocks reappeared after several kilometres of inland walking and the opportunity to get up close is very cool. The Rocks are both impressive and curious and made a great spot for lunch before continuing east along the coast.

Toilets are located at Cape de Couedic Lighthouse, as well as Remarkable Rocks. There is also the option to finish the day with a side trip to the secluded beach of Sanderson Bay.

The final stretch of the trail is along the south coast of the island near Hanson Bay.

Day 4 - Sanderson Bay to Hanson Bay Road

Leaving Sanderson Bay and walking along the coast, the western view back towards Remarkable Rocks has changed. The landscape has taken on a new perspective since the bushfires and admiring this from the top of the cliffs as another rain front approached made a spectacular sight.

As Cape Younghusband starts to appear, the route has now been redirected inland along the fire trail around the recovering Southern Ocean Lodge property. This change provides unique views back inland from the coast and it was along this fire trail that we spotted our first Rosenberg Goanna.

Upon reaching the designated pick-up point at Hanson Bay Rd we took the opportunity to extend our walk and headed south again to the Hanson Bay headland. There are toilets available at the pickup point and finishing the day with the view east across the bay was well worth it.

You can still see the charred remains from where the bushfire reached the banks of the South West River.

Day 5 - Kelly Hill Caves to Hanson Bay

Our fifth and final day was our shortest distance on the trail and since the bushfires, this section has been redirected. It is now walked in reverse - starting at Kelly Hill Caves and concluding at Hanson Bay.

For those who have walked the trail before you would remember the pulley boat to get you across the South West River. Unfortunately, this boat was lost in the fire and the trail now leads through that area up to the beach.

This last section was just over 10km, which we completed in just under 4 hours. There are transportable toilets to start the walk at Kelly Hill Caves and like the previous day, upon reaching Hanson Bay, there are toilets available there.

Carefully managed foot traffic along the trail helps to keep the path clear of vegetation.

Supporting Bushfire Recovery

1. Some areas of the island have suffered irreparable loss and many megafauna species are now extinct.

2. Recording plant and animal observations via citizen science apps like *iNaturalistAU* and *ClimateWatch*, assists with research and understanding of how the environment is recovering. Knowledge, awareness and education all contribute to better conservation outcomes.
3. A portion of your trail fee is directed to rehabilitation and conservation programs.
4. Walker numbers are limited and to support this stage of recovery and all bookings must be made through a licensed tour operator.
5. Through the careful management of numbers, the South Australian National Parks and Wildlife Service are encouraging and promoting the *Fire Recovery Experience*. Regular foot traffic along the trail helps to control and limit the regrowth of vegetation on the path while enabling the surrounding environment to thrive.

Let's all pick up rubbish and dispose of it responsibly.
If you come across rubbish and ocean waste, [#take3forthesea](#) and pick it up as you go. Every little bit of effort contributes towards a greater positive impact. With your CTO pick-up at the end of each day's walk, the Fire Recovery Experience gives visitors a perfect opportunity to protect our waterways as well as our native flora and fauna.
For fees and up to date information visit the [website](#) and their [FAQ](#) page.

We did it and what an achievement it was!
Our group walked an approximate total of 77km over 32 hours, a distance and timeframe that includes the numerous side trips we undertook.
Across the 5 sections, we battled sideways rain, faced wind strong enough to knock you off balance and basked in soothing sunshine. We ventured through the regenerating scrub, along coastlines and followed creeks. We saw native flora rehabilitating, native fauna re-establishing their habitat and tourism returning to the area.
I would encourage anyone to embrace this experience while you can. It's an opportunity to celebrate the resilience of Mother Nature and witness Karta Pintingga 'The Island of the Dead', coming back to life. It really was a uniquely special experience and after 5 days, our group felt such a huge sense of achievement.
As one of my students perfectly reflected on the experience...

'What I took away from this experience is, hiking is a metaphor/example of life. You just have to keep on moving and put one foot in front of the other. There are always going to be bumps in the road, but in the end, we can always reach our goals if we keep on moving forward at our own pace, and discover more about ourselves.'

Are you keen to visit Kangaroo Island and support the Fire Recovery Experience?