

GREAT  
COASTAL  
WALKS  
.....  
WILD SOUTH  
COAST WAY,  
SA

# COAST WITH THE MOST

Despite its proximity to South Australia's capital, the Wild South Coast Way lives up to its name with plenty of solitude and spectacular views.

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WORDS\_ALEXIS BUXTON-COLLINS. PHOTO A B-C AND SATC



Parsons Beach in  
Newland Head CP.





**Clockwise from top:**

Waitpinga Cliffs in Newland Head CP.

Natunyuru Ngawanthi in Newland Head CP.

You'll meet some friendly locals on the trail.

Blowhole Beach in Deep Creek NP.



**THE** emerald-green meadows at the tip of the Fleurieu Peninsula are laden with dew that makes them sparkle in the morning sunshine, their slope naturally leading my eyes to a waterline where granite rocks dusted with bright orange lichen pop against a cobalt blue background. Across the Backstairs Passage, the Kangaroo Island ferries look like toy boats beneath sheer cliffs that plunge straight down into the glittering waters.

It's a far cry from the dusty outback landscape of the Flinders Ranges. Exactly 1200km, as a nearby sign informs me. At least, that's how long it would take me to follow the Heysen Trail from its starting point at Cape Jervis to Parachilna Gorge in South Australia north. Fortunately, I'm only tackling the first 74km on a route that's been known as the Wild South Coast Way since Easter.

**A Good Start**

Along for the ride is Max, a teacher celebrating the last week of school holidays by getting as much fresh air as possible. Winds blown up from Antarctica grant that wish as we set off from the Cape Jervis ferry terminal but I have trouble keeping my eyes on the trail. Instead, they constantly wander off to the right so I can admire the broad sweep of sand at Antechamber Bay and the matchstick of Cape Willoughby lighthouse at Kangaroo Island's western end.

Closer at hand, fields of bright yellow flowers provide welcome splashes of colour



## MAPS AND TRAIL NOTES | WILD SOUTH COAST WAY, SA

Length: | 74km Time: 5 days. | Grade: moderate



**Day 1:** Cape Jervis to Wuldi Krikin Ngawanthi (Eagle Waterhole), 16km, 5 hr

**Day 2:** Wuldi Krikin Ngawanthi (Eagle Waterhole) to Yapari Ngawanthi (Cliffs) 10km, 3.5 hr

**Day 3:** Yapari Ngawanthi (Cliffs) to Kurri Ngawanthi (Creek), 18km, 5.5 hr

**Day 4:** Kurri Ngawanthi (Creek) to Natunyuru Ngawanthi (Sand Dunes), 13km, 4hr

**Day 5:** Natunyuru Ngawanthi (sand dunes) to Kent Reserve, Victor Harbor, 17km, 6hr

**Note:** Maps and trail notes can be accessed via the Avenza App (avenzamaps.com)



Expect some creek crossings.

## NEED TO KNOW

Some sections of the Wild South Coast Way are very exposed, and the best time to walk the trail is in spring or autumn. The 74km trail can be walked in either direction, and all campsites are within 2km of a carpark. Each camp has pit toilets, water tanks and a food preparation shelter. Book through [parks.sa.gov.au/parks/wild-south-coast-way](http://parks.sa.gov.au/parks/wild-south-coast-way), \$28 per night (per site).

### Getting there

Cape Jervis is about 90 minutes south of Adelaide, and Victor Harbor is just over an hour's drive. There is plenty of parking at both ends of the trail and The Backyard Universe ([thebackyarduniverse.com.au](http://thebackyarduniverse.com.au)) can provide transfers for walkers.

### Accommodation

If you want to stay the night before or after walking, Big4 Cape Jervis Caravan Park is located less than five minutes from the Cape Jervis ferry terminal and offers both motel-style rooms and campsites. At the other end, NRMA Victor Harbor Beachfront Holiday Park has a mix of cabins, campsites and glamping tents.

beside the trail and a reddish falcon waits atop one of the trail markers to see us off. It alights at our approach, but a bearded dragon closer to the ground is less inclined to make way, puffing itself up to try and ward us off the trail that switches between packed dirt, sand and exposed limestone.

With the sun on our backs, it's utterly charming, though I know from previous trips how quickly conditions can change. Last time I was here, the grey rocks slicked with rain and fierce winds pushing me inland towards thickets of gorse gave it more than a passing resemblance to a stretch of Scottish coast.

This first section of trail hugs the shoreline but includes a few detours inland to avoid private dwellings, the most memorable of which is a three-bedroom house shaped like an aeroplane wing so that the winds blow straight over it. Even more distinctive is the UFO-like structure next door, which the fantastic SA National Parks App informs me is a Finnish Futuro pod from the early 70s.

## Into the wild

As lovely as it is, this stroll through cleared farmland is just an entree. Slopes covered in dense sclerophyll forest make it easy to pinpoint

the exact moment we set foot in Deep Creek NP, and the lung-busting climb from Blowhole Beach gives me plenty of time to admire the local flora.

Bushes covered in tiny white flowers look like they've been dusted in icing sugar, and the dappled light beside the trail reveals clusters of delicate purple, green and white spider orchids. Further back in the shadows, two metre tall tufts of yacca lurk like dormant banksia men.

When we finally reach the top of Cobbler Hill I gratefully drop my pack and fill up my water bottle at the nearby campsite, but our day isn't over just yet. There are still a few kilometres to walk before we reach Wuldi Krikin Ngawanthi, which means Eagle Waterhole in the Ramindjeri language. The four walk-in only campsites along the Wild South Coast Way are where most of the upgrades have taken place, and each has ten tent sites that are a mix of raised timber tent platforms and earthen camping sites. There are also new pit toilets and a shelter with food prep benches, tables, a filtered water tap and even a solar-powered USB port.

When I catch up with Senior Ranger Simon Oster after the walk, he explains that "the facilities at each one are the same but the settings are very different. We took a bit of



**Clockwise from top left:**

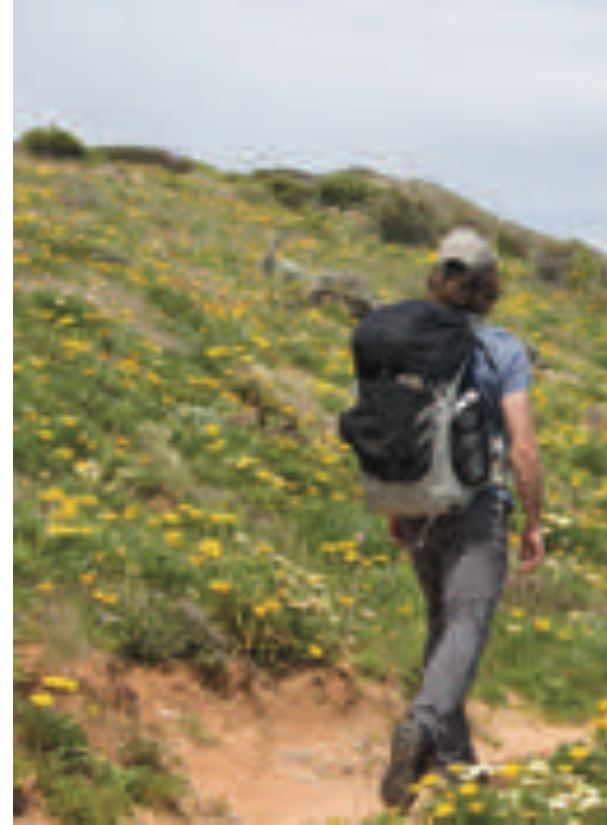
Viewing platforms add to the experience.

The trail is clear and well signposted.

New shelters include water tanks, seating and a cooking area.

Raised platforms make for comfortable camping.

Yapari Ngawanthi in Deep Creek NP.



time to handpick these sites because we wanted to make them remote from vehicles and noise, so you feel a sense of being away from everything else.”

This is his pick of the bunch for first-time hikers, and the Wild South Coast Way has been developed so that it’s easy to tackle short sections of it. The walk-in nature of the site means no campfires or speakers blasting tunes into the night air, but because it’s only two kilometres from the nearest carpark the site attracts a good mix of through hikers and overnights. One couple celebrating their 20th anniversary tells me that it was an approachable option for her first overnight hike, and allowed him to bring some extra luxuries – including a bottle of Champagne that they pop as the sun sets.

**Watch the dip**

In the morning, the slope above us glistens with silvery dew that quickly disappears once the sun comes over the hill. KI is still regularly visible to our right, but as we venture deeper into the park we traverse several large valleys where the vegetation closes in. Early in the day, we both still have plenty of energy and the conversation flows freely until a loud laugh from Max startles a large brown snake just metres ahead of us on the path. The silence that follows is short, and the experience reaffirms the importance of good communication.

Even on the ascents, the thick vegetation around us provides plenty of shade but it’s warm enough that I’m grateful when we reach the bottom of the second valley and find cool air rushing off a secluded waterfall. A pool below the cascade is too good an opportunity to pass up, so I quickly strip off for a swim and admire the reddish hue my



limbs get in the tannin-stained water.

The swim would be even more satisfying if it was at the top of our next climb, but the alternative is pretty good. From a cliff-top lookout, the ceaseless roar of the Southern Ocean provides a soundtrack to stunning vistas of two wind-battered rocks known as the Pages Islands and the rugged coastline stretching out in either direction. After stopping to admire the view, we track inland to Yaparri Ngawanthi (Cliffs) campsite, an entirely new site set in dappled woodland along a ridge where an elevated viewing platform looks out over the surrounding forest.

## Back to school

As we're setting up our tents, Max cocks his head, his ears so finely attuned that they pick up the sound of three fifteen-year-olds coming back to camp a full minute before I do. They're part of a family group hiking in the opposite direction and after swapping some notes, we learn that their principal is

also at the campground. When we meet him over dinner, he laments that work has a habit of following him everywhere, concluding with a laugh that "22,000 steps just isn't enough!"

Sadly, work also means Max has to drive out from the nearby car park the following day while I continue out of the National Park and onto Tunkalilla Beach, where the intrepid family started their walk. It was, they admit, "a bit of a slog" but one made more enjoyable by a pod of dolphins that followed them along the beach. That marine escort is nowhere to be found when I arrive, but a pair of hooded plovers keeps me company for part of the walk, teasing me with how easily they scoot across the sand.

From Tunkalilla the trail heads inland once again, through public land on a stretch that includes some road walking to Kurri Ngawanthi (Creek) campground. And while the scenery is more muted on this leg, it's setting me up for a patch of wilderness that's smaller but perhaps even more beautiful than Deep Creek.

## Use your head

Located at the end of the Mount Lofty Ranges, Newland Head Conservation Park includes a stretch of breathtakingly beautiful seacliffs that deliver both bracing ocean breezes and jaw-dropping coastal views in abundance. Whales cavort offshore in winter, while white-bellied sea eagles soar high overhead year-round. Looking out at this wild landscape, it's a shock to realise just how close the nearest town is. Natunyuru Ngawanthi (Sand Dunes) campground is only 17 kilometres from the sleepy coastal town of Victor Harbor, though it doesn't become visible until the trail passes below the imposing granite headland known as The Bluff.

That final day, which takes in towering seacliffs and wild surf beaches, open pink gum forest and small town streets, is a microcosm of the Wild South Coast Way and its constantly shifting landscapes. And though the track itself isn't new, the upgraded facilities have transformed it into one of South Australia's most accessible hikes while retaining a sense of isolation that ensures it lives up to its name. 🌀



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