



It was raining, the road ahead was shrouded in a mist of rain. The driver of the minibus we were in said it wouldn't be much, and she was right. By the time we arrived at the information centre, it had stopped. Starting at the Information centre in Flinders Chase National Park, the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail is a 61-kilometre 5-day walk that takes you through a mixture of forest, thick scrub, and amazing coastline.

It passes such features as Rocky River, the wild Southern Ocean, Cape du Couedic Lighthouse and Remarkable Rocks. At times the Wilderness Trail can be rough with lots of rocky surfaces to walk over as you pass through low scrubby areas of vegetation. And other times you are going through beautiful eucalyptus forests.



*This trail takes you along the Southern Ocean, and beautiful eucalyptus forests.*

## The beginning of the walk

My wife and I had the obligatory photo taken at the gate you go through at the beginning of the walk and then we headed off. At first, the trail is well maintained and takes you past some waterholes where if you are patient it is possible to see a platypus.

We waited with several other people, but it was in vain, so we decided to keep moving. Other walkers we met, later on, said they had better luck and got some great shots.



*The trail takes you along the soft sand of the beach.*

## The first section

The first section you pass through are forests of Eucalyptus and Mallee, and if you are there in spring then we were told many wildflowers would be in bloom.

There are lots of wildlife and birds, but you have to keep your eyes peeled as they are pretty shy. We also went past a rocky outcrop called the cascades which were supposed to be very scenic, if there was water in them.

We did see a wild pig at a rest stop which didn't hang around. They are a pest, and there were many signs of where they were digging into the ground causing a lot of damage as they searched for food.



*This is an example of the typical track surface you'll be walking on.*

## Cup Gum campsite

The first day is only about four hours walk and finishes at Cup Gum Campsite. The facilities at each of the campsites are excellent. Here we had a choice of raised platforms or sand pads for the tent to be erected on. Although at the other camps there were only sand pads.

The shelter has several large tables and a stainless steel bench for cooking on, as well as a sink and taps powered by a pump and filtered water, (although it was still advised to treat the water before drinking).



*The end of the first day finishes at the Cup Gum Campsite.*



## Shelters and facilities available

There were also solar powered lights that came on as it got dark, which were also in the toilets. There are stainless steel basins in the toilets with a tap as well, also connected to a pump. They look brand new, and since every camp is accessible by a service road, they are cleaned almost every day. These were the best shelters I have ever seen in my many years of walking and camping.

One of the best parts of walking holidays is meeting other walkers and sharing experiences. The comradery in the camps was great, with everybody friendly and easy to talk to.



*The shelters had excellent facilities.*

## The second day of the walk

The next day we started heading to the coast along the Rocky River until it meets the sea. We then walked along the cliff tops with the wild foaming sea below. The views along this part of the coast are spectacular. We stopped many times to try and capture it on our cameras.

At one point you descend to Maupertuis Beach and walk along its soft sand. This was quite hard as the sand was really soft. We did try to walk closer to the water's edge looking for harder sand but often had to make a run for it when a wave came rushing in.



*Eventually, you'll descend to the soft sand of Maupertuis Beach.*

In the end, we found walking in other people's footprints was the best way. So long as you found someone with the same stride you would be fine.

After about a kilometre we went back up to the cliff tops and continued there for the rest of the day. The surface of the track here is pretty rough, consisting of mainly broken limestone. This was a bit hard on the feet and legs as you have to step over never-ending rocks and small boulders.

In the distance, you can see the Cape du Couedic Lighthouse. It gets closer each time you come over a small ridge, but it is never reached as the track turns inland about 2km before it and shortly after that, you arrive at the Hakea Campground.



*Linda and I at the mouth of the Rocky River.*

## Keeping your gear clean and dry

My only criticism of the campsites is the lack of any sort of raised platform to sit a backpack on that is close to the tent. Since the tent sites are sand it means whatever you put on the ground risks getting dirty.

It may only be a small thing, but most walkers like to keep their gear as clean as they can when sometimes washing opportunities are limited. We found by putting our rain covers over the harness we could lay our packs on the ground face up therefore not getting anything dirty and still accessing our gear from the packs.





*Packs at rest.*

## The weather conditions

The weather overall was fairly good, with cool days and on the first two days, we had some light drizzly rain that was more annoying than anything. We did get some rain on our first night though, otherwise, we had reasonably good weather for the entire trip.



*We had reasonably good weather on our hike.*

## The third day of our hike

Our third day went inland and curved around towards the South coast of the island coming out at Remarkable Rocks.

For me, this was the most boring section of the trail as it went through thick scrub that didn't allow any views anywhere. All you could see was thick scrub.

It was good to finally come out at the coast and take the side trail to Remarkable Rocks where we caught up with some of the others and were able to eat lunch while looking around this impressive natural feature.

We still had about 4km to go so we loaded up again and went back in the scrub, for only a little bit, then back out to the coast where we continued along more impressive cliff tops.



*Having a rest at Remarkable Rocks.*

## Banksia campground

Our third camp was called Banksia Campground with the usual great facilities. There was plenty of conversations around the cooking tables as we discussed the pros and cons of everybody's different setups and walking experiences.

This was our coldest night with the temperature going down to about 4 degrees, and the next morning everybody had their flysheets hanging on trees and bushes trying to dry the condensation off before we packed them away.



*A much easier section of the trail.*

## The next day

We continued on from Banksia firstly toward the coast then back inland. The terrain was changing now with the limestone giving way to smoother sections where walking was much easier. We were now going through more open forests rather than thick scrub.

We knew we were getting closer to Hanson Bay Beach as we started to hear waves crashing ashore, but where was it. It can be a little frustrating when you know you are close to something but just can't seem to get there.





*Hopping aboard the boat.*

## Crossing the river

We knew up ahead there was a small river we had to cross using a boat with a rope attached to pull ourselves over, but it seemed to take forever to reach it. This was going to be our lunch stop and we were getting hungry.

Finally, there it was. A small boat for one person and their pack at a time to cross. We watched some of the others go first as we had our final lunch break on the trail.

We then took turns to cross over and left our packs with some of the others just off the trail and walked the 300 meters down to the beach. It was almost deserted with a few small cabins on the other side of the beach that were able to be hired out.

We returned to pick up our packs and in about half an hour we were at our final camp, Tea Tree Campsite.



*Crossing the South West River.*

## The final night - Tea Tree campsite

It was a lovely sunny afternoon, and everybody sat around soaking it up until the sun went down. Then the night chill started to come in and everybody started preparing their final dinner of the walk.

It was another chilly night and more tent fly's had to be dried before we could head on our way. This was our last day and it was only about 7 kilometres to go.

## The last section of the trail

This last section of the trail went through eucalyptus forests and past lagoons where there was some bird life, but you would have needed a good lens for your camera as the birds were all across the other side several hundred meters away.

It only took us about two hours to do this last part, and then we were at the finish at Kelly Hill Caves. I set up my camera on a timer and took our photo as we went past the sign that said we had completed the walk.



*A side trip to Admirals Arch.*

## Services on the trail

Part of the fee you pay to do the walk covers a cave tour. It was a bit disappointing to realise we'd missed the tour that the other walkers we were with went on, as we were last to arrive. Still, we saw them when they came out of the caves and we were able to say our goodbyes. From the caves, we contacted the campground where we left the car and they came to pick us up. Because the Wilderness Trail is not a circuit, arrangements have to be made to be picked up when you finish. National Parks can offer this service as well as several other resorts and campgrounds.



*Reaching the end of the trail.*

## **Fitness and gear you'll need**

The Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail is an enjoyable walk with varied terrain and fantastic scenery. It can also be done as a series of day walks with pickups by arrangement at each campsite, or car shuffling to some of the public car parks along the way.

You would need to have a reasonable amount of fitness as you will be walking about 13km each day except for the last day when it is only 7km.



*You'll need to be quite fit, as you'll be walking on sand.*

Good boots are essential because of the rocky surface. Some may prefer walking shoes, however, don't bother with lighter footwear.

For fees and up to date information contact the information centre at Flinders Chase National Park, so get out there, and enjoy.

**Is the KI Wilderness Trail on your list of hikes to do?**