



Back on the Friday night of the June long weekend a group of 16 of us carpooled from Adelaide. We didn't receive the blessing of perfect hiking weather until Saturday morning. Heavy rain made the dirt road to the trailhead very slippery indeed. After a cold, drizzly overnight camp at Black Jack's Shelter, we rejoined the cars and drove to our official starting point where the Heysen Trail intersects Dust Bowl Road.

This is when the perfect weather began. And our most macho, 35kg pack-wielding hiker introduced himself to a roll of fence wire with harmless but comedic results!

Starting the hike

Following a fence line, we ascended a steep, scraggly hill with great views of the scrubby country. The track was a bit hard to identify at some points but became easier once we began going in and out of creek beds. Our destination was the shelter at Carroona Creek Conservation Park, which concluded a comfortable day's hike of approximately 12kms. The group set up camp near the modern and recently built shelter.



This section of the Heysen Trail is covered in the [Southern Guide](#). If you're serious about chipping away at some sections of the Heysen this, and the Northern Guide, are a worthwhile investment.

We were joined by some car campers, being the June long weekend it was quite busy, but it never felt like we were intruding on each other's space. There's a drop toilet at this camping spot, but BYO paper as usual. Recent changes mean fires are no longer permitted in the park.

The next day

The next day we walked past a waterhole and up Tourilie Gorge to a great lookout over the area we'd just hiked through. The trail mostly follows a small creek, so getting lost didn't become a problem. There is also a nice historic hut, Tourilie Gorge Hut, that is easily missed as it can't be seen from the track. Just ascend the small hillock about 200m back from the waterhole.



A 'true blue' bush camp in Carroona Conservation Park.

Mt Bryan East Schoolhouse

Passing into open farmland after a brief section of native pine, we came to the old Mt Bryan East Schoolhouse. The farmer, Arthur, who owns the surrounding land dropped in for a yarn, and kindly delivered a huge log for the night's fire!

The old school is available for accommodation for Heysen Trail hikers. Inside are a couple of large rooms with approximately 20 bunks, and a fireplace keeps it warm as the nights can get very chilly.



How's that for a view?



Cooking meals on the trail

Those who dared to cook on the fire had varying success, but the rest of us used the usual Trangia or MSR-style stoves. I was trying out some new recipe ideas and was pleased with the low weight and tastiness of dried peas (a packet serves about 10 people!), Deb Mash Potato, and Foster Clarke Instant Custard. Gourmet camp cooking right there!

The challenge of Mt Bryan

Mt Bryan itself was the challenge for the next day – roughly a 320m ascent over 1.5 km needing more than a small effort! The 360-degree view at the top was astounding. And, we found a good resting and tea spot on the lee side of the hill.

The afternoon descent to Hallett was gentle, through green valleys with plenty of friendly sheep around. We waited and played Uno while our drivers did the car shuffle. Then we hit the road for the 3-hour drive home to Adelaide.



Ascending Mt Bryan.

Weather, water availability and mobile coverage

The fresh and sunny June weather held throughout the hike. The days were warm but nights got chilly, certainly down to 0 degrees.

Water was not a problem at this time of year, with near-full tanks at each overnight stop on the trail. However, the Carroona area is quite remote with patchy mobile coverage and it would be worth informing someone reliable of your plans and carrying a PLB.

The dirt access road (White Hills Road) after Burra might shake the family sedan around a bit but is quite achievable.

What is your favourite stretch of the Heysen Trail?