



# Outback South Australia Tour (including opals and fossils)

22 April - 2 May 2022



Mulga Parrot. P. Waanders

*We are thrilled to once again offer our highly successful 10-day adventure into the fabled Australian Outback where we will enjoy the birding riches, fascinating mammals, and extraordinary geological relics, of this fascinating region. This tour takes advantage of the sunny yet mild weather in the austral autumn, so you can enjoy this remarkable region in relative comfort. Your guides on this tour will be Dr Tonia Cochran and Peter Waanders, with Ben McHenry from the South Australian Museum who will provide commentary on the rare geological wonders of the Outback and give us behind-the-scenes access to an internationally significant fossil site.*

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## **ITINERARY OUTLINE:**

Day 1. Fri 22 April 2022. Arrive in Adelaide. Private Museum tour fossils and opals.  
Day 2. Sat 23 April 2022. Adelaide-Port Augusta-Kimba  
Day 3. Sun 24 April 2022. Lake Gillies Conservation Park – Gawler Ranges  
Day 4. Mon 25 April 2022. Mount Ive Station to Coober Pedy  
Day 5. Tue 26 April 2022. Coober Pedy  
Day 6. Wed 27 April 2022. Coober Pedy to Andamooka; Arid Lands night tour for native mammals  
Day 7. Thu 28 April 2022. Andamooka to Maree.  
Day 8. Fri 29 April 2022. Lake Eyre to Flinders Ranges  
Day 9. Sat 30 April 2022. Flinders Ranges  
Day 10. Sun 1 May 2022. Flinders Ranges to Adelaide  
Day 11. Mon 2 May 2022. Depart Adelaide airport.

## **DETAILED ITINERARY:**

**B- breakfast; L- lunch; D-dinner.**

### **Day 1. Friday 22 April 2022. Arrive in Adelaide.**

Today we meet at our Hotel in Adelaide at 13.30. After meeting up and storing our luggage there will be an opportunity to meet with Ben McHenry, a geologist/palaeontologist at the South Australian Museum, who will take us on a behind-the-scenes tour. Ben will also meet us again in Coober Pedy and will accompany us on tour from then providing expert interpretation on geology and palaeontology. Ben is also an avid birder!

**Accommodation:** Hotel in Adelaide (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** D.

### **Day 2. Saturday 23 April 2022. Adelaide-Port Augusta-Kimba.**



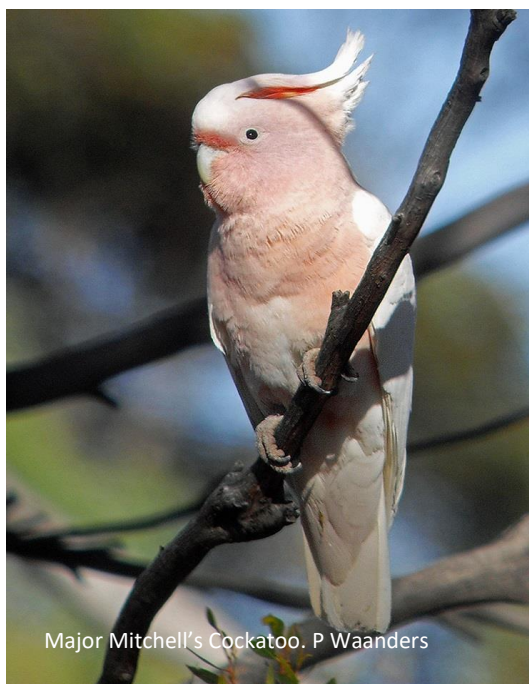
Arid but rich South Australia by P Waanders

We'll depart Adelaide after an early breakfast. Just outside the city we'll visit the Greenfields wetlands with good chances of Australian Spotted and Baillon's Crake, as well as a wide variety of waterfowl including ducks, waders and Royal Spoonbill. We then follow the coast north, where we look for the *rosinae* race of Slender-billed Thornbill and the *rosina* race of White-browed Scrubwren. We'll explore the western slopes of the Remarkable

Ranges, with chances of birds such as Elegant Parrot, Chestnut-rumped Heathwren and Redthroat. At Port Augusta we visit the beautiful Arid Lands Botanical Gardens, where an array of native flowers and shrubs attract such species as Chirruping Wedgebill, White-winged Fairy-wren and numerous honeyeaters. A nearby coastal lake usually has Banded Stilt. At the end of the day, we arrive at the township of Kimba on the eastern edge of the Eyre Peninsula.

**Accommodation:** Kimba Motel (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

### Day 3. Sunday 24 April 2022. Lake Gillies Conservation Park – Gawler Ranges.



Major Mitchell's Cockatoo. P Waanders

Today we'll explore Lake Gilles Conservation Park, a mixture of 'mallee' eucalypt scrub, open woodland and salt lakes which contains Australia's eastern-most populations of Western Yellow Robin and Rufous Treecreeper. Other great species we're likely to encounter here are Hooded Robin, Mulga Parrot, Purple-crowned Lorikeet, Purple-gaped and White-fronted Honeyeater. Later in the day we visit the rugged Gawler Ranges, a spectacular contrast to the coast and home to Short-tailed Grasswren. The park also includes other good birds such as Major Mitchell's Cockatoo, Black-eared Cuckoo, Crested Bellbird, White-browed and Rufous Treecreeper and Splendid (turquoise race) Fairy-wren. Exploring the various habitats of the park we may encounter Western Grasswren (formerly *myall* race of Thick-billed Grasswren) in the bluebush-covered plains, while Short-tailed Grasswren (formerly *merrotsyi* race of Striated Grasswren) inhabit spinifex habitat. Our final destination for the day is Mt Ive Station,

a working sheep station where we overnight in comfortable quarters on the property. As this is the only accommodation for hundreds of miles, we will need to share a large bathroom block tonight, a small price to pay for the wonderful birds and scenery!

**Accommodation:** Mt Ive Station (rooms with shared bathrooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

### Day 4. Monday 25 April 2022. Mount Ive Station to Coober Pedy.

An ancient landscape of spectacular scenery, historical land marks and solitude awaits us as we



Red Kangaroo. A. Stevenson

explore little-used bush tracks along the edge of the stunning Lake Gairdner. One of South Australia's vast outback salt lakes, and usually dry, this area has long been regarded as the jewel in the crown of Australia's scenic sights. The stark beauty of the landscape – expanses of salt, red sand dunes, gnarly old trees and seemingly endless plains - is full of contrasts and offers great photographic opportunities. For the interested observer, there are signs of Aboriginal and European history throughout these ranges. Explorer's campsites, indigenous gravesites, ruins and homesteads are but a few of the reminders of bygone days. If good winter rain has fallen, there will be a profusion of flowering outback plants (including the rare Sturt's Desert

Pea), birds such as Crimson and Orange Chat, Banded Whiteface, Inland Dotterel and a chance of the rare Bourke's Parrot, and wildlife including plenty of Red, Western Grey and Euro Kangaroos, and with luck the beautiful and endangered Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby. At the end of the day we finally emerge

from this area onto the Stuart Highway, which cuts through the centre of Australia, linking the south coast (Adelaide) with the north coast (Darwin). Tonight, we overnight in the opal-mining town of Coober Pedy where the summers are so hot that residents have taken to living in underground dwellings; no matter how harsh the climate, the underground rooms maintain a comfortable, even temperature ranging from 23°C to 25°C day and night throughout the year. Here, a unique experience awaits us as we spend the night in an underground hotel, the world's first 4-star luxury property of its type, carved out of opal-bearing rock and complete with mining display and opal gallery. Above ground rooms are also available for those who don't fancy sleeping "underground" (just let us know at the time of booking). **Accommodation:** Hotel in Coober Pedy (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Day 5. Tuesday 26 April 2022. Coober Pedy.** An entire day is spent around Coober Pedy and we will reunite with Ben from the South Australian Museum who will accompany us for the remainder of the trip. This morning we will search for the endemic and elusive Chestnut-breasted Whiteface, as well as Thick-billed Grasswren before we make for the Breakaways Reserve 32km north of Coober Pedy. In this lovely reserve of colourful hills that have separated from the adjacent range, hence "The Breakaways", we will stop at two lookout points that highlight the open spaces and colourful environment, leaving an impression of the long gone inland sea that our early explorers dreamt of. As the day progresses the passing of the sun changes the desert colours, creating surreal photogenic scenes. Interestingly, we will also pass the Dingo Fence, a 2m high and 5,300km long wire barrier that stretches across three states to protect sheep farms to the south from our wild dog, the Dingo. The desert-like moonscape along the fence, with its fossilised shells, grey, soft clay dirt and cracks that appear to be bottomless, has been nicknamed the "moon plain". Around 110 million years ago, when



Opal Miner's home at Coober Pedy. A. Stevenson



Opal Fossicking at Coober Pedy. T. Cochran

dinosaurs roamed the Earth, Coober Pedy and most of northern South Australia was covered by ocean. Later tectonic movements saw the seas recede to the north and the sediments previously deposited were exposed to the air and subjected to deep acidic weathering. Silica, dissolved from these sediments and deposited in cracks and cavities, solidified over time into Australia's multi-coloured national gemstone – the opal. We will have the chance to try our luck at finding this precious gem on a tour of a privately-owned Opal mine. **Accommodation:** Coober Pedy (en-suite rooms) as for last night. **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Day 6. Wednesday 27 April 2022. Coober Pedy to Andamooka; Arid Lands night tour for native mammals**

Today we'll travel to William Creek and then down one of Australia's famous outback tracks, the



Oodnadatta Track. It follows an ancient trail used by Aborigines for ochre trading for thousands of years. Artesian mound springs supply water in this arid region. Aborigines relied on this water source, so too did the European explorers who used the route to build the Overland Telegraph and the Old Ghan railway lines in the late 19th century. The track takes us through true Outback country: gibber (wind-eroded stones) plains, rocky hills, and wildflowers after good rain. We will visit one of the famous mound springs along the Track where we will learn of the source of life-giving

groundwater in this area – the Great Artesian Basin. This area is also home to Inland Dotterel and Gibberbird, while we also stand a chance of coming across a rare Grey Falcon...! Late afternoon we check in at the quirky but comfortable Andamooka Motel, before our visit to the Arid Recovery Reserve, a 123 km<sup>2</sup> wildlife reserve run by an independent non-profit organisation who pioneer conservation science to help threatened species thrive across the Australian outback. We will take a guided tour through some of the unique habitats of Australia's arid zone before stopping at a viewing platform to watch the spectacular desert sunset. At dusk, we will travel through the dunes to get up close and personal with some of the Reserve's amazing animals, including greater bilby, western barred bandicoot, burrowing bettong and spinifex hopping mouse. We will then return to our accommodation in Andamooka. **Accommodation:** Andamooka Bottlehouse Motel (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Day 7. Thursday 28 April 2022. Andamooka to Maree.** After yesterday's late-night adventures, a more relaxed departure this morning and then we'll continue our travels on the Oodnadatta Track. We'll check a waterhole fed by an artesian bore which has created an oasis in the desert and where many species of birds come down to drink and breed. We may well see the resident pair of Black-breasted Buzzards, or a flock of Inland Dotterels, while Budgerigars and Cockatiels roost in the Coolibah trees or buzz around in the sky. Other birds of note for today include Cinnamon Quail-thrush, Chiming Wedgebill and Rufous Fieldwren. We may even see a herd of feral Dromedaries! At the end of the day, we arrive in sleepy Marree where we spend the night in a beautiful historic outback hotel. **Accommodation:** Marree Hotel (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

### Day 8. Friday 29 April 2022. Lake Eyre to Flinders Ranges.

In the morning there is an optional scenic flight over Lake Eyre (around \$450 per person own cost for 60-90 minute flight). The rest of the group will enjoy birdwatching at the access track to Lake Eyre with a good chance of Black-breasted Buzzard. Mid-morning we'll depart and head south calling in at the ghost town ruins of Farina, followed by a brief visit to the impressive indigenous ochre pits near Lyndhurst. This afternoon we will visit the Ediacara Conservation Park where in 1946, geologist Reginald Sprigg discovered fossil imprints in rocks in the Flinders Ranges at the old Ediacara minefield. This discovery was the first time the fossilised remains of an entire community of soft-



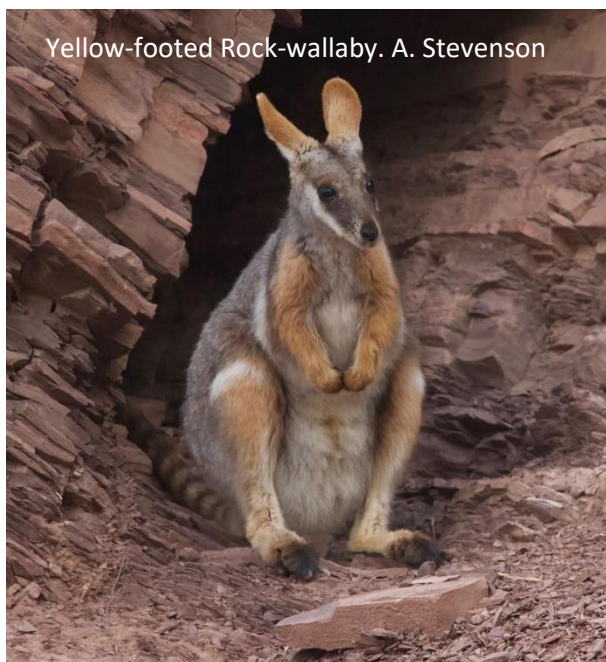
Flinders Ranges scenery. T. Cochran

bodied creatures had been found in such abundance anywhere in the world. This discovery was so significant that fossils were named after him and the Ediacaran Period was named after the location where the fossils were found. The fossils preserved in the 560 million year old sea-floor sediments throughout the area record the first known multicellular animal life on Earth that predates the Cambrian. This diverse and exquisitely preserved community of ancient organisms represents a significant snapshot of our geological heritage. We then visit the township of Parachilna overlooking the

Flinders Ranges, an impressive range of steep hills and soaring rock formations on the edge of Australia's outback. **Accommodation:** Wilpena Pound Resort, Flinders Ranges. **Meals included:** B, L, D.

### Day 9. Saturday 30 April 2022. Flinders Ranges.

Today we spend a full day today exploring the Flinders Ranges. With rugged mountain scenery, peaceful gorges and a huge array of wildlife and flora, the Flinders Ranges National Park is recognized



Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby. A. Stevenson

as one of the finest landscapes in Australia. The centerpiece, Wilpena Pound, is a magnificent natural amphitheatre of mountains. Nearby, spinifex-grass covered hills are home to the elusive and highly localized Short-tailed Grasswren and the diminutive Elegant Parrot. Wedge-tailed Eagle often soar over the grassy slopes. Rocky gorges which traverse the ranges are inhabited by Elegant Parrot and Grey-fronted Honeyeater. From west to east, our route leads us back through time along the Brachina Geological Trail which follows the gorge cut deeply through the ancient geological layers of the Ranges by the Brachina Creek. Highlights will include an early Cambrian archaeocyatha (ancient sponge) reef, a chance to literally straddle the PreCambrian/Cambrian boundary plus a further chance to see Ediacaran fossils *in situ*. Deeper

through the gorge we will see the remains of 640 million year old glaciers and a visit to the Golden Spike – the place where the Ediacaran geological period was formally declared. We'll also take time to visit a 645 million year old stromatolite reef (produced by the activity of ancient cyanobacteria). With

luck we'll also observe and photograph a colony of the endangered, beautiful Yellow-footed Rock-wallaby. We will also drive through the magnificent Bunyerroo Gorge and stop at the site of a 600 million year old meteor impact. We'll have ample opportunity to observe and photograph the landscape and its inhabitants including the three local species of Kangaroo. **Accommodation:** Wilpena Pound Resort in the Flinders Ranges. (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.

**Day 10. Sunday 1 May 2022. Flinders Ranges to Adelaide.** This morning we visit the indigenous cave paintings at Arkaroo Rock. This is a significant cultural site for the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges and the walk takes us to a rock shelter with paintings featuring ochre and charcoal images that depict the Yura Muda (Dreaming, or creation story) of Ikara (Wilpena Pound). There is also some great birding in the area. From here, we leave the Flinders Ranges and head south once more towards Adelaide. We travel through the scenic Clare Valley, a well-known wine region where, at this time of the year, the lush green pastures and flowering wattles make for a very scenic landscape. We stand a good chance of seeing Adelaide Rosella, Brown and Rufous Songlarks and a variety of raptors. We return to Adelaide late afternoon where we will settle into our hotel and have a final dinner together. **Accommodation:** Hotel in Adelaide (en-suite rooms). **Meals included:** B, L, D.



**Day 11. Monday 2 May 2022. Depart Adelaide.** No activities have been scheduled for today. Breakfast (included) this morning can be taken at your leisure after which you can spend the day exploring the city and nearby River Torrens and/or Botanical Gardens, re-visit the Natural History museum to reconnect with the things we've learnt, or simply go to the airport to head home. **Accommodation:** none. **Meals included:** B.



## **PRICING AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:**

**Group size:** 6-8 participants, 2 specialist guides and a geologist.

**Tour Price:** AU \$8,380 per person sharing.

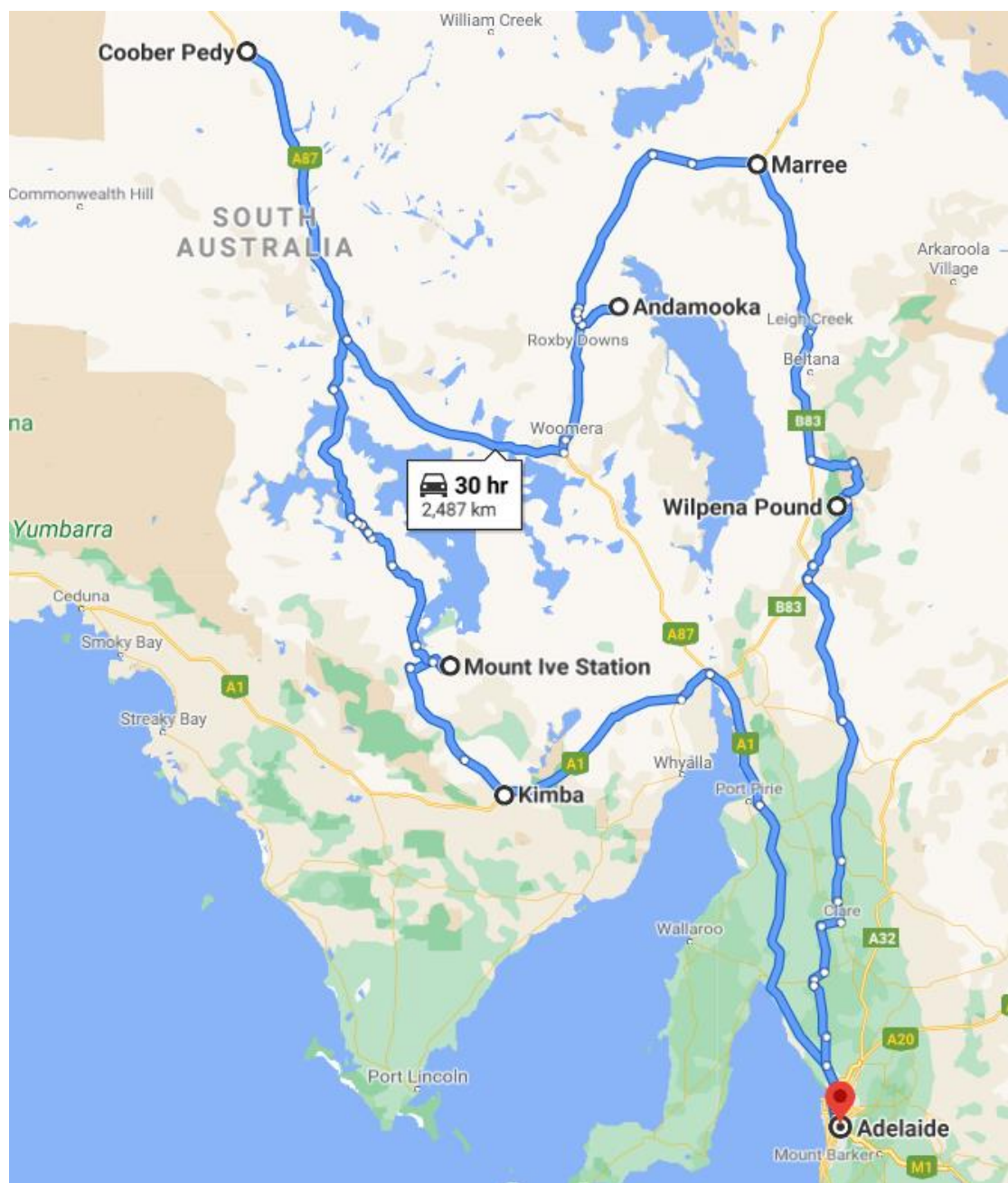
**Single supplement:** AU \$855

**Price includes:** 10 nights' accommodation, specialist guide and transport, meals, entrance fees and activities as mentioned in the itinerary.

**Price does not include:** Airfares, alcoholic beverages, snacks, internet, laundry or other items of a personal nature.

### **Please note:**

- **Meals and drinks:** Breakfast generally consists of a continental style breakfast with cereal, fruit and yoghurt and tea/coffee. Full cooked breakfast is not generally offered at most locations. Lunch will generally consist of a packed lunch style meal eaten in the field, with sandwich/filled roll, fruit, and a drink. Dinner usually consists of several options for main with the choice of either an appetiser or dessert. Drinks (soft and alcoholic) are generally not included but at lunches and breakfasts juice may be made available.
- **The itinerary:** Whilst we aim to follow the itinerary as planned, please note that the itinerary provided should only be used as a guideline. Depending on individual trip circumstances, weather, and local information, the exact itinerary may not be strictly adhered to. The guides reserve the right to make changes to the itinerary as they see fit.



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