

How western Kangaroo Island national parks are recovering

Accurate at June 2021

The 2019-20 bushfire event on Kangaroo Island was the largest in the island's recorded history and burnt almost half the island.

In total, about 200,000 hectares of the 440,500-hectare island was burnt.

Bushfire damage to national parks on Kangaroo Island

The western end of the island, home to the internationally renowned Flinders Chase National Park, was heavily affected by the bushfires – almost 90,000 hectares of park land was affected.

A total of 96 per cent of Flinders Chase National Park and the adjoining Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area was burnt, as well as 98 per cent of the nearby Kelly Hill Conservation Park and Cape Bouguer Wilderness Protection Area.

The Rocky River visitor precinct in Flinders Chase was also destroyed, including the visitor centre, campground facilities and picnic areas. Also impacted were the boardwalk and the toilet facilities at the iconic Remarkable Rocks.

Park attractions that survived the bushfire

Although the iconic Flinders Chase National Park was severely affected, the park's popular Cape du Couedic Lighthouse and lighthouse keeper's cottages were saved.

Admirals Arch, a famous home to a colony of long-nosed fur seals, was also unaffected.

While the infrastructure around Remarkable Rocks perished, the granite boulders themselves were not damaged.

The Cape Borda Lightstation and heritage lighthouse keeper's cottages were saved.

The recovery efforts

National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) is continuing to undertake works to help affected parks and reserves recover.

This has included supporting native wildlife recovery, rebuilding visitor facilities and creating a process to [reimagine nature-based tourism in these special places](#).

Essential infrastructure is being rebuilt to make parks accessible for visitors, and the recovery of affected wildlife is being supported with activities ranging from rapid assessment surveys and native animal relocations, to feral cat and pig management.

Funding of \$52 million has been committed to reimagine, renew and rebuild parks visitor facilities across Kangaroo Island – noting that not only has the Kangaroo Island tourism industry been hard hit by bushfires, but also by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding will go towards:

- a new \$10m visitor hub adjacent to the Flinders Chase National Park entrance which will provide visitor services for eight western KI parks
- rebuilding Remarkable Rocks boardwalk and facilities, May's Homestead and Postman's Cottage and the [Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail](#)
- upgrading campgrounds, day-visitor facilities and a pedestrian bridge at Antechamber Bay in Lashmar Conservation Park
- upgrading visitor facilities at Murray Lagoon in Cape Gantheaume Conservation Park
- creating a new camping experience at D'Estrees Bay in Cape Gantheaume Conservation Park
- enhancing visitor experiences in Cape Willoughby Conservation Park.

Now open for business

The bushfire-affected Flinders Chase National Park has always been a key part of the Kangaroo Island visitor experience.

NPWS continues to work with its network of licensed tour operators and regional tourism leaders to find new and creative tourism offerings in Kangaroo Island parks.

While locations within bushfire-affected parks are continuing to be reopened following the completion of essential works, some experiences and visitor facilities may still be reduced during the recovery process.

Here's how the journey is tracking:

June 2020

After the 2019-20 bushfire event, the park's iconic sites of Remarkable Rocks, Cape du Couedic and Admirals Arch reopened to visitors in June last year.

December 2020

The five-day, 61 km Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail, which ran from Flinders Chase National Park Visitor Centre to the Kelly Hill Caves, opened again in early December – albeit in a different format.

Now known as the Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail – Fire Recovery Experience, it provides a unique experience for walkers to see the natural process of vegetation recovering from bushfire as it's never been seen before.

'Unmasked' landscapes and the beauty of regenerating plants can be seen by walkers as they make their way along the trail, and they can also experience stunning panoramic views of the headlands and Southern Ocean.

Currently the trail is open for day-walkers only (rather than overnight campers), which must be booked via a licensed tour operator. Visit the [Kangaroo Island Wilderness Trail website](#) for more information.

January 2021

In January this year, construction began on a new boardwalk at Remarkable Rocks which is scheduled to be completed by mid-year.

The rebuild provides an opportunity to improve the experience available to visitors and will include new

access paths, lookout platforms and information shelters.

April 2021

The following roads, campsites and walking trails reopened to the public in April 2021:

- Shackle Road and West Bay Road
- West Bay and Harvey's Return campgrounds
- Ravine des Casoars and Cape du Couedic hikes.

Standing strong

Six stunning parks on Kangaroo Island were unaffected by the 2019-20 summer bushfires and continue to provide visitors with great opportunities to experience the island's natural and heritage wonders.

There's experiences ranging from guided beach tours of a sea lion colony at Seal Bay Conservation Park – one of the island's top tourist attractions – through to staying overnight at the Cape Willoughby heritage cottages.

Visitors can go at their own pace to explore:

- Baudin Conservation Park
- Beyeria Conservation Park
- Cape Gantheaume Wilderness Protection Area and Conservation Park including Murray Lagoon and D'Estrees Bay
- Cape Willoughby Conservation Park
- Lashmar Conservation Park
- Seal Bay Conservation Park
- Latham Conservation Park (open for visitors to walk through only).

Visit the [NPWS website](#) to learn more about the amazing experiences on offer in [Kangaroo's Islands national parks](#).

Closed national parks

Kelly Hill Conservation Park is closed until further notice (note: Kelly Hill Caves survived but restoration work is progressing).

Parks may close seasonally or for conservation activities to be undertaken.

Information on park closures is regularly updated on the NPWS website.

