3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FLINDERS RANGES LANDSCAPE

“...the Flinders Ranges is one of the most diverse regions of South Australia, and is undoubtedly one of Australia’s great tracts of scenic beauty”
Alisa Bunbury, 2002. Arid Arcadia Art of the Flinders Ranges. Art Gallery of South Australia

In this chapter, descriptions of studies of the region’s landscapes are summarised, commencing with those of the original Adnyamathanha inhabitants, then the early explorers, pastoralists, and artists. Previous assessments of the landscape of the Flinders Ranges are described. Finally, the significance of the Flinders Ranges for tourism is examined.

3.1 ADNYAMATHANHA DESCRIPTIONS

The Aboriginals of the Flinders Ranges, the Adnyamathanha people (literally the “hills” or “rock” people) comprised many tribes with distinct territories, often extending out to the surrounding plains. The physical landscape formed the template for stories from the Dreamtime or Dreaming, the rich heritage of mythological ancestral beings whose actions created the Ranges. The Aboriginals speak of the “landscape of their stories”, so intimately woven is their history to the fabric of the place. They personalise their description of the land as “country”, not “the country”, as in “I return to country”.

Australia, no less the Flinders Ranges, is covered by an intricate web of Dreamings. Sites do not exist in isolation but are intrinsically linked with other sites through this web. The stories are expressed through totemic associations with natural species and phenomena, ritual songs, dances, objects and designs such as paintings and those recorded on caves (Miller, 2003).

Aboriginal people have profound spiritual linkages with the land. The land is of prime importance as the source of nurture, both physically and spiritually. The land is dense with meaning – with song and story and with living spiritual representatives manifested as features of that countryside. Most Aboriginal art is a statement concerning land: not just any piece of land but specific stretches of land substantiated through identified mythological associations.

Arid areas such the Flinders Ranges may “appear empty and inhospitable to those who do not know them, but to the Aboriginal groups who inhabit those areas, the lands created by their ancestors and infused with the powers, are places rich in spiritual meaning and physical sustenance. Across this landscape spreads a web of ancestral paths travelled by the supernatural beings on their epic journeys of creation in the Dreaming, linking the topography firmly to the social order of the people.” (ibid)

The aesthetics of Aboriginal art is the aesthetics of the Dreaming. The Aboriginal aesthetic pervades the stories, songs and physical depictions (e.g. paintings) of the Dreaming. It is expressed through a range of distinctive motifs and designs.

Locations within the Flinders Ranges provided resources which were used to help bring alive the Dreaming stories. On the western slopes of the Heysen Range lies the Pukardu ochre mine which for generations untold has yielded dark pink ochre of a fine texture and metallic sheen. It was traded across the country, with Aboriginal people travelling from southern Queensland and was used in the most important ceremonies. The ochre wall at Arkarooala was also of significance.
Engraving sites found at Chambers Gorge and Sacred Canyon comprise pecked patterns of animal tracks and circles, footprints, animals and other designs. Some of these may be among the oldest human art in the world; engravings in hills south near Yunta have been dated by their patina at over 40,000 years. Many of the symbols used have no link to the current Adnyamathanha people and they regard as having been produced by ancestral beings. Given that perhaps as many as a thousand generations have occupied these areas since, it is amazing that they remain untouched and unchanged.

Many of the place names of the Flinders Ranges perpetuate the Aboriginal language: Aroona, Wilpena, Arkaba, Oratunga, Angorichina, Parachilna, Patawarta, Arkaroola and Balcanoona.

3.2 DESCRIPTIONS BY EXPLORERS AND COLONISTS

We had been much pleased with our day’s ride. We were surrounded with trees, and the glimpses caught through them of the distant hills (near Mount McKinlay) had a charm for us. Such a country we would have despised in the southern district of the colony, but here, where the country is generally so open with immense plains, having but little or nothing to relieve the eye, we were induced to admire its appearance.

James Henderson, 3 August 1843 (Bunbury, 2002).
On 9 March 1802 Matthew Flinders reached the head of Spencer Gulf and realised that the coasts of New Holland and New South Wales were the one continent. He observed the southern Flinders Ranges and sighted “a chain of rugged mountains, at the further end of which was a remarkable peak” – Mount Brown overlooking Pichi Richi Pass. This was the southern Flinders Ranges, far less rugged than the northern Flinders Ranges.

The early explorers, Eyre, Frome, Horrocks and particularly Sturt were intent on finding the way north to a mythical inland sea, Sturt even transporting a large boat for the purpose of exploration. From a high hill near Hawker Eyre saw to the north “ranges (which) rose in lofty broken outline, tier behind tier of very rocky appearance as far as the eye could reach...” However Eyre’s observations of Lake Torrens convinced him of a horseshoe of lakes curving around the ranges and preventing access inland. Later, on climbing Mt Searle and seeing a salt lake to the east (Lake Frome) convinced him of the horseshoe lake.

Eyre then headed north-east to the northernmost extremity of the Flinders Ranges to Mt Hopeless, named probably from his (mistaken) realisation that a horseshoe lake surrounded the ranges, preventing access to the interior of the continent. En route he passed through “some imposing scenery consisting of cliffs from six hundred to eight hundred feed in height” (Mincham, 1964) and recesses never touched by the sun, perhaps Yudnamunta Gorge in the Arkaroola area.

On 1803, Frome, the colony’s Surveyor-General, exploring along the eastern side of the ranges in 1843 found Lake Frome but believed to be the southern end of Lake Torrens. They reached Mt McKinlay, Frome believing it to be Eyre’s Mt Searle.
James Henderson, an artist, (quoted at top of this section) was on Frome’s expedition. Searching for land suitable for agriculture Frome was unimpressed with the area: “a more barren sterile country cannot be imagined”. He discovered Mt Chambers east of the ranges which he called Eagle’s Nest Hill.

Wilpena Pound was discovered in 1850 by a stockman, William Chace (after whom the Chace Range is named) and taken up by as a pastoral lease by his employers, W.J. and J.H Browne. Some of the early surveyors in the Flinders Ranges were famous explorers or have had their names perpetuated in the region: John McDouall Stuart, Rawnsley (Rawnsleys Bluff), John McKinlay (Mt McKinlay) and J.M. Painter (Mt Painter). Pastoralists quickly spread across the ranges with herds of sheep and cattle, changing forever the land and its vegetation. The introduction of rabbits in the late 1880s caused massive destruction to the flora. Many mineral claims were staked and copper mines rapidly established through the Ranges.

In 1859, the Governor, Sir Richard Graves McDonnell travelled through the Flinders Ranges and he was surprised and impressed by the “extreme grandeur” of the scenery. According to Mincham, he expressed regret that “no competent artist had yet transferred to canvas the striking and wild beauties” of the North Flinders (P 249).

In 1850 Frederick Hayward settled in the Aroona Valley, built a slab hut, planted figs, mulberry and willows on a spring, and by 1862 had made himself a wealthy pastoralist, retiring back to England. Aroona was known as the “Garden of the North” and was located in superb surroundings, overlooked by the Heysen Range.

J.B. Austin travelling through the area in 1862 wrote, “I think the twenty miles of country including Aroona and Wilpena contain more
subjects for the artist’s pencil than any other part in the North.” (Mincham, 1964). Writing lyrically about the Aroona Valley, Austin wrote, “I saw no other place in the North at all to be compared with it….I thought it one of the loveliest spots I ever behld…The is a combination of the wild and grand, with what is softer and more gentle, and without any violent contrast, which would mar the general effect. The scene is perfectly harmonious… (it is) a beautiful valley, wee grassed and containing some good timber on either side of the range. St Mary’s Peak, one of the highest points of the Wilpena Pound range, towers away in the distance.”

Pastoralists progressively moved north and took up leases in the northern Flinders Ranges during the 1850s. By around 1860 most of the Ranges held pastoral leases and in addition, prospectors and fossickers moved amongst the ranges seeking gold, copper and other minerals.

3.3 DESCRIPTIONS BY ARTISTS

Hans Heysen

In the twentieth century, the paintings of Hans Heysen established in the public’s mind the beauty of the Flinders Ranges and in particular the Moralana area, Aroona Valley, and Mt. Patawarta. Heysen made Hayward’s homestead in the Aroona his base for painting the Ranges and his paintings of the area included The Three Sisters of Aroona and The Guardian of the Gap – the mountain at the entrance to Brachina Gorge as well as paintings of St Marys Peak and the Wilpena Range.

Hans Heysen first visited the Flinders Ranges in 1926 but was overwhelmed by their appearance and painted nothing on that visit. He wrote of his impressions of the landscape to Lionel Lindsay, a fellow artist:

My first impression upon arrival was that of expanse, of simplicity and beauty of contours; the light flat and all objects sharply defined; distances very deceptive and no appreciable atmospheric difference between the foreground and the middle distance; indeed, hills at least four miles away appear to unite, and scale becomes an important relative factor…the contours of the hills …clear edges without much foliage…always a beautiful balance between the pyramid and the circle.
Forms in the north are more clearly defined, the skies hard blue and the colour dry and crumbly. Reds, ochres and chocolates are the dominant colour schemes and the blue hills are the keynote. As in all mountain forms, there was a very evident repetition of forms, and many of the hills in the Aroona Valley leading to the Wilpena Range have the appearance of arrested waves on the verge of breaking. (Mincham, 1964)

Between 1926 and 1933 Heysen made ten trips to the Ranges and a further two in the late 1940s. He was awarded the Wynne Prize for landscape painting nine times, twice for paintings of the Flinders Ranges’ testimony to the appeal of his art. His paintings of the Flinders Ranges “dazzled Australia’s urban dwellers, who were almost wholly unaware of the appearance of the arid regions of Australia … his paintings were seen as strikingly unusual and modern.” (Bunbury, 2002). Heysen thus played a significant role in opening Australians to the beauty of the arid mountainous interior of their continent.

The artistic possibilities of the Flinders Ranges were described by Hans Heysen:

The Flinders region has held a “spell” over me ever since I first went to Quorn and Hawker… I had come into contact with the “bones of Nature” laid bare. Since then my interest in this unique landscape has grown with each successive trip into the Arkaba and Aroona country. I have found each trip (and they have been many) an exhilarating

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experience in form and colour … The stark outlines of the Flinders excite after the more gentle undulations of the Mount Lofty Ranges… The great Red Gums in the creek-beds of the Flinders fill me with wonder; their feeling of strength of limb, of vigour and life, suggest the very spirit of endurance. They fascinate me as do the “bare bones” of the ranges. (Mincham, 249)

Sir Lionel Lindsay described Heysen’s art thus:

Hans Heysen is the last of our representative artists, and though he came a decade later, he links with the school of Streeton and Roberts, which was founded upon truth in light, character and atmosphere. No need to stress Heysen’s love of his country, his mastery of the gum, his knowledge of landscape forms. (Mincham, 1964, p. 250)

The historian, Sir Keith Hancock drew analogies with the Middle Eastern landscapes in Heysen’s work:

Quite recently (Heysen) … travelled north to a vivid and primitive country of Arabian landscapes and Arabian names - Arkaba, Wilpena, Brachina, Edina. There he transcribed a new Australia of dry, flat, light, hard skies, clamorous reds and ochres – Dolomite masses and sharp forms, a landscape of fundamentals (Bunbury, 2002, p. 73).

Charles Fenner, a leading geographer with a close understanding of the Flinders Ranges wrote to Heysen of his disbelief at his accuracy of form: “….your pictures seem to me, quite apart from their beauty, somewhat miraculous … It seemed uncanny that the anatomy of the landscape might be so nakedly revealed.” (Thiele, 1968, p. 201)

Horace Trenerry

A contemporary of Heysen, Horace Trenerry, also painted in the Flinders Ranges in 1939. His painting of the right hand peak of Heysen’s Three Sisters of Aroona has a stronger intensity of colour than Heysen but lacks the three dimensional quality of Heysen’s work.

Harold Cazneaux

The photographer, Harold Cazneaux visited the Flinders Ranges several times in the late 1930s and recorded his impressions by his camera. Cazneaux’s Flinders profile shows Pt Bonney in the Wilpena range.

His Spirit of Endurance was originally titled A Giant Gum from the Arid Land of the North but during the Second World War he renamed it Spirit of Endurance to symbolize Australia’s “determination against the odds” (Bunbury, 2002). The overgrazing and soil degradation, evident in Cazneaux’s image has been largely rectified with removal of stock and control of rabbits. The recent image shows a tree sprouting healthy foliage and its roots much more covered.
“This is the spot described by Professor G.H.F. Ulrich in 1872 as ‘wildly Alpine in character presenting bare, brown looking precipitous mountains and broken spurs, studded with fanciful cliffs and peaks divided by narrow rifts and gorges, whilst, in picturesque contrast, tower gently sloping hills, less broken ranges, covered with coarse vegetation succeed towards the North.”

Source: Sprigg, R., 1989. Geology is Fun. p. 141
“The University of Adelaide’s heavily laden Dodge Buckboard descending into the vicinity of the Yudnamunta Mines in NE Flinders Ranges” (mid 1930s).

3.4 CONTEMPORARY ASSESSMENTS OF THE FLINDERS RANGES LANDSCAPE

Over recent decades there has been considerable attention given to the assessment, management and protection of the environmental qualities of the Flinders Ranges.

Flinders Ranges Planning Area Development Plan

During the preparation of the Flinders Ranges Planning Area Development Plan by the State Planning Authority in the early 1970s, the author contributed to the delineation of the Class A, B and C Environmental Zones. The Development Plan included a map of scenic areas (Figure 3.1), differentiated simply into General scenic areas and Spectacular scenic areas.

The Plan (Figure 3.1) established the division of the region into three classes of environmental area. Class A represented the highly scenic ranges of the region and includes the Chace and Druid Ranges, Elder Range, Moralana and Wilpena Pound, the Heysen and ABC Ranges, the Bunkers.
Range, Patawarta Hill – Mount Hack, Stirrup Iron Range, Chambers Gorge, the Gammon Ranges, Mount Painter – Freeling Heights and areas towards the north end of the Flinders Ranges. Class B provided a buffer between the Class A and the rest of the Planning Area was designated as Class C.

The concept of the Environmental Zones has continued to the present Development Plan for the Flinders Ranges (Land not within a Council Area [Flinders]) but only the Classes A and B are now included. Class A aims to conserve the environment and landscape of the area and restricts new buildings and structures, mining and new roads. Class B allows somewhat greater freedom of development.

John Dallwitz

In 1977 through the then Department of Environment and Conservation, the author commissioned John Dallwitz, a well-known artist, to conduct an assessment of the Flinders Ranges landscape. Dallwitz used a wholly subjective approach in which he assessed landscape elements (landform relief & geological exposure; vegetation diversity & scale; pictorial composition form, depth, scale, rhythm & proportion; visual detail, colour, texture & contrast) together with transitory elements (wildflowers, clouds, lighting, wildlife). These were rated on a 0 – 12 scale (12 high). He assessed the exposure visibility of a location based on its dominance and viewing area. Modifications to an area from settlement, mining and structures resulted in points being added or subtracted from the ratings.

Dallwitz produced a map with five landscape grades from unsightly to outstanding (Figure 3.2). The grading is coarse and, particularly at the high end, fails to differentiate areas – large blocks are all graded as outstanding without any lesser areas within them. It is surprising that he included the Mt Hack – Patawarta – Mt Uro area among the outstanding grade and therefore on a par with the Elders – Wilpena – Heysen range and Gammons – Arkaroola area although this replicates the Development Plan. Nevertheless he did achieve a complete coverage of the Flinders Ranges using a graded approach to landscape quality.
Source: Dallwitz, 1977

**Figure 3.2 Dallwitz’s Flinders Ranges Landscape Assessment**
Table 3.1 Visibility of Central and Northern Flinders Ranges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Points visible</th>
<th>Central Ranges</th>
<th>Northern Ranges</th>
<th>Total Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Km² %</td>
<td>Km² %</td>
<td>Km² %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 – 5</td>
<td>3988 65</td>
<td>4452 96</td>
<td>8440 78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – 15</td>
<td>1464 24</td>
<td>185 4</td>
<td>1649 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 – 30</td>
<td>571 9</td>
<td>2 0.04</td>
<td>573 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31 – 40</td>
<td>96 2</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>96 0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 – 50</td>
<td>26 0.4</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>26 0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 – 60</td>
<td>15 0.2</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>15 0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 80</td>
<td>2 0.04</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>2 0.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The Northern Ranges omitted the Arkaroola Ridgetop Track and Heysen Trail
Source: Department of Environment and Planning, Flinders Ranges Management Review

Flinders Ranges Management Review

During the late 1980s, the South Australian Department of Environment and Planning commenced a major Flinders Ranges Management Review as a response to perceived land use conflicts and problems in the region. After four years work and surveys of over 10,000 km² which was less than half the total 27,000 km², the study was terminated. The regions covered were Elders – Wilpena – Heysen Range and eastward, and the Chambers Gorge – Gammons – Arkaroola area. These were known, respectively, as the Central Ranges and the Northern Ranges. The study focused mainly on vegetation distribution, pastoral capability, soils and pests but included a section on landscape visibility.

Using a fairly coarse Digital Terrain Model and data points at 500 m intervals along roads, trails and other localities, the landscape visibility component identified the number of locations from which a data point could be seen. The authors noted that the method was not an attempt to assess landscape attractiveness based on visibility. Scores ranged from zero to 115. Table 3.1 summarises the landscape visibility scores from all tourist roads, the Heysen trail and other trails, and from tourist facilities and point destinations. The omission of the Arkaroola Ridgetop Track and the Heysen Trail in the Northern Ranges significantly diminished the results for this area.

The report noted that in the Central Ranges it was the contrast between the ranges and the adjacent valleys and plains that made the upland areas so visible. In the Northern Ranges, however, the “topography is more closely packed, with ranges often separated from each other by only narrow valleys, thereby restricting the opportunity for panoramic views…”.

In the Central Ranges, the Elders, Wilpena Pound and Heysen Range are very prominent while in the Northern Ranges, Mount Chambers and the Chambers Gorge and the areas around Arkaroola are prominent.

Landscape Quality Assessment of South Australia

In his PhD dissertation, Landscape Quality Assessment of South Australia (Lothian, 2000), the author identified the Flinders Ranges as an area of high landscape quality. The study, based on community rating of selected photographs from across the State, placed the region in its State context (Figure 3.3). The Elders, Moralana, Wilpena Pound and Heysen Range rated 8 and the Gammons – Arkaroola rated 7. Other high ranges rated 6. Most of South Australia’s top rated areas were around the coast – particularly southern and western Eyre Peninsula and south western Kangaroo Island and the only other highly rated inland area was the Musgrave and Mann Ranges in the State’s far north-west which rated 7. The areas of the Flinders Ranges which rated 8 were the highest rated inland area in South Australia.
Source: Lothian, 2000

Figure 3.3 South Australian Landscape Quality
Figure 3.4 Scenes of the Flinders Ranges used in South Australia landscape quality rating
The seventeen photographs used in the survey (Lothian, 2000) covering the Flinders Ranges plus one from a similar arid region are displayed in Figure 3.4 in descending order, together with the rating derived from the survey (1 – 10 scale). Some of these images were used in the present survey.

Ratings of the 17 Flinders Ranges scenes ranged from 4.8 to 8.4 with a mean of 7.0 (SD 0.96). This was the highest regional average in South Australia after the coastal region which averaged 7.7.

Among the findings from the overall survey were the following.

The ratings of scenes according to their terrain clearly indicated its effect on ratings (Table 3.2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land form</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flats</td>
<td>4.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hills</td>
<td>5.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountains</td>
<td>7.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Rock faces in the Flinders Ranges (16 scenes) and other arid northern ranges (7) were scored for their extent and steepness, 1 being absent or not present through to 5 being of considerable extent and steepness. Table 3.3 indicates that the extent and steepness of the rock faces had a positive influence on ratings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rock face score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Ratings of rock faces

Table 3.2 Influence of terrain on ratings – all South Australian scenes

The heights of the terrain relative to the viewer were found to be significant. Measurements of the difference in height between viewer and the topmost feature in the scene, and the angle of view to the topmost feature indicated that both had a generally positive influence on ratings (Table 3.4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Ht diff. mean</th>
<th>Angle of view mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Ratings of height difference and angle of view

The height and density of trees generally had a positive influence on ratings. Ratings of vegetation found in the Flinders Ranges averaged as follows.

- Arid grass and spinifex 4.8
- Arid trees and shrubs 5.2
- Arid mountains and vegetation 7.3
- Chenopods (salt bush, blue bush) 5.6
- Creek-side trees (red gums) 6.1
- Native pines (*Callitris*) 7.0

Ratings of all scenes across the state were influenced by the holistic qualities of diversity (i.e. the busyness of the scene) and naturalness (i.e. without human influence visually apparent). Ratings rose with both diversity and naturalness, being among the strongest influences of ratings. The Flinders Ranges displays diversity in its land forms and land cover and this factor would expect to be present, however naturalness is likely to be stronger influence in the region.

Factor analysis of the Flinders Ranges scenes identified three components:

- Red-orange ranges and hills
- Ranges with trees
- Steep extensive rock faces

Together these factors explained 61% of the variance in the scenes.

Other landscape descriptions

Additional reports on the Flinders Ranges which refer to the scenic quality of the region include the following.

South Australian Development Plan, Land not within a council area (Flinders).

The Flinders Ranges are one of the most spectacular landscape regions in South Australia. They form an area of outstanding natural beauty, markedly different from other landscapes within the State, but similar in form to the arid ranges of central and north-west Australia.
Flinders Ranges National Park Management Plan

The rugged scenery of the Flinders Ranges National Park is one of the major attractions of the area... National Parks and Wildlife Service, 1983.

Vulkathunha-Gammon Ranges National Park Management Plan

The park conserves some of the most rugged landscapes of the Northern Flinders Ranges where the alternating soft and hard sedimentary rocks of the region have been folded and faulted and then deeply eroded and incised by the action of running water. The resultant signature landscape has a special, spectacular beauty: chasms, gorges, bluffs and plateaus complement the ridgebacks, rolling hills and out-ash plain of the Balkanuona Creek.


Arkaroola is a 610 sq km Wilderness Sanctuary established by Dr Reg Sprigg and his family in 1968. Arkaroola’s website highlights the area’s scenic qualities:

Located ... in the more rugged and spectacular northern Flinders Ranges, this ... Wilderness Sanctuary ... contains some of Australia’s most spectacular mountain views. Arkaroola features rugged mountains, towering granite peaks, magnificent gorges and mysterious waterholes... The spectacular ... rugged 4WD Ridgetop Tour is world famous; journey to the depths of ancient seabeds and across razor-back ridges and peaks of the Flinders Ranges most rugged mountains to the magnificent climax at Sillers Lookout.

Arkaroola includes among its scenic assets, Mt Painter (790 m), Mt Gee (the "crystal mountain"), the Armchair, the Pinnacles, the Freeling Heights (950 m), Yudnamunta Gorge and the Paralana Hot Springs. Immediately adjacent to the south of Arkaroola is the Vulkathunha - Gammons Ranges National Park with Mt McKinley, Arcoona Bluff, Benbonyate Hill (1057 m) Mainwater Pound, Weetootla Gorge and Italowie Gorge.

National Landscape Designation

In 2008, Tourism Australia and Parks Australia named the Flinders Ranges as a National Landscape, described as follows:

National Landscapes identify the best of Australia’s nature and culture - inspirational destinations such as Australia’s Red Centre, Flinders Ranges, the Great Ocean Road and Kakadu. These areas showcase and promote the best of Australia and are sought after by the global target audience of Experience Seekers, travellers keen to experience new adventures and destinations unique to Australia.


National Landscapes description

The rugged and majestic Flinders Ranges is where the ancient landscapes reveal the story of life on earth.

South Australia’s largest mountain range stretches over 430 kilometres. The Flinders Ranges are an emotionally uplifting, ancient place offering sanctuary and tranquility. Its most characteristic landmark is Wilpena Pound; a natural amphitheatre covering nearly 80 square kilometres.

The region (Figure 3.5) defined as the Flinders Ranges National Landscape was rather arbitrarily defined as extending from Lake Torrens east nearly to the South Australia – NSW border near Broken Hill, and from Crystal Brook north to Lyndhust. Apart from the incongruity of including Lake Frome and the plains south to the Barrier Highway and beyond, it also omits the Flinders Ranges north of the settlement of Arkaroola which is level with Lyndhust. Thus it excluded the Mt Painter and the Freeling Heights areas.
3.5 VISITATION AND PERCEPTIONS

During 2007, the Flinders Ranges attracted 439,000 overnight visitors and 419,000 day visitors with more interstate and international visitors than any other S.A. region except Adelaide (SATC, 2007). Nearly 17% of all overnight visits in regional South Australia included visits to the Flinders Ranges and Outback. Visitor spending averaged $102/night and $112 for day visitors. Domestic overnight visitors were more likely
than visitors to other S.A. regions to be from interstate, be over middle age and non-working. They visited national parks and heritage sites, bushwalked. Many visited the Flinders Ranges as part of a tour. There were around 28,000 international overnight visitors, generally in their 20s, many being backpackers, with three-quarters from Germany, UK and other European countries.

In 2000, the SATC carried out regional branding research to ascertain perceptions about different South Australia regions. It was based on focus groups in Adelaide and Melbourne and 800 telephone interviews in Adelaide, Melbourne, Regional South Australia and western Victoria. The survey found that 74% of South Australians regarded Flinders Ranges as very appealing or fairly appealing (40% Victorians) compared with 64% for Adelaide. It followed the Barossa Valley and Adelaide Hills (Figure 3.6). The Flinders Ranges scored highly for adventure and discovery (Figure 3.7).

Although the segment covered the Flinders Ranges and the rest of the outback, it was apparent that the responses focused on the Flinders Ranges. The consultants concluded that:

“more than anywhere else in South Australia, the Flinders is seen to offer something unique. It is associated with ancient, Australian and aboriginal history, and of great geographical significance. It is in all senses awesome, breathtaking, spiritual, untouched”.

Source: Regional Branding Market Research

**Figure 3.6 Brand strength of the Flinders Ranges**

Source: Regional Branding Market Research

**Figure 3.7 Brand strength of the Flinders Ranges by benefit segment**
Nature-based tourism

The essence of the Flinders / Outback SA region was perceived to be:

“spirituality and unique, Australian colours. The spirit of early white pioneers, the spirit of Aboriginal heritage and concomitantly, the spirit of the land: desertscape, rivers, gorges, ranges, plateaus, Wilpena Pound, Lake Eyre, bush, commanding gum trees, wildlife and bird-life’.

The results of the quantitative phase of the research indicated that the region was the most 'powerful' brand across a range of descriptors. All of the descriptors for the Flinders Ranges were above the State average (Figure 3.8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Nature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differentiator</td>
<td>Ancient / spiritual adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Images/products</td>
<td>Rugged mountains, Wilpena Pound, Ridgetop (Arkaroola), Craggy peaks, gorges, camping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated themes</td>
<td>Heritage &amp; culture, Aboriginal culture, wildlife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Niches</td>
<td>Bushwalking, astronomy, cycling, geology, fossils, 4WD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.5 Flinders Ranges nature-based tourism