

# The Heysen Trail

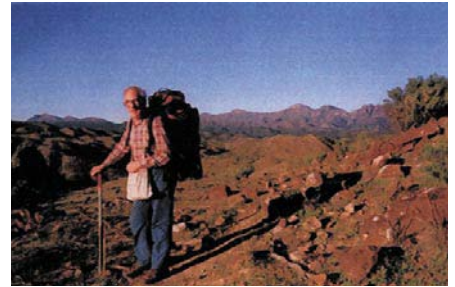
by Ted Fleming, Canberra Bushwalking Club

*Seventy Heysen Trail End to End Certificates have been granted since their inception. Anecdotal evidence suggests that about 200 walkers have walked the entire Heysen Trail.*

It is about 1500 km in length and is a long way from Canberra. That's why it has taken me six years to walk from end to end of the Heysen Trail in South Australia. Only 68 persons are recorded as 'doing' the whole thing; some have done it in less time, and others have walked the whole trail in a single hit, but that would clearly involve some complicated logistics, for this trail passes close to only a few towns and access by public transport is very limited.

People ask what the trail is like and I find myself unable to give a clear answer. It cannot be compared with any long distance walk on the eastern seaboard; after all it is in South Australia. I think of it as comprising three ill-defined sections.

- a) The first is in the south from Cape Jervis to Tanunda in the Barossa Valley. Edward Fleming at Bunyeroo From the start the rugged coastline is followed through the beauty of the Deep Creek Conservation Park with constant views out to sea and to Kangaroo Island and possible glimpses of the occasional whale. It is characterised by short, steep climbs and descents and significant beach walking. North of Victor Harbour the trail passes through much 'developed small-farm land but maximum use is made of green' roads and unfrequented gravel roads, and wherever possible stiles give access to tracks across private property. Myponga and Yulte Conservation Parks are rugged, scrubby or forested and are a prelude to the climb up Mt Cone and onward to cross the Finnis River before ascending Mt Magnificent with its 360 degree views.



Beyond Mt Magnificent the track traverses the extensive Kuitpo Forests and also passes through the old goldfields at Jupiters Creek and Echunga before skirting the eastern edge of Adelaide's urban sprawl to ascend Mt Lofty. After Mt Lofty the trail undulates steeply through native or pine forest as well as crossing through hills orchard country. Beyond Kersbrook a section through the Warren Conservation Park passes through dense native forest, a habitat for millions of orchids. More large pine forests follow and Mt Crawford makes demands on the walker, but after that the trail crosses beautiful park like grazing country, then through parts of the Kaiserstuhl Conservation Park to drop suddenly out of the Barossa Range to enter Tanunda at the old Lutheran village of Bethany.

- b) Beyond Tanunda the trail passes through the very highly 'developed' Barossa Valley in which it is sensitively restricted to 'green' roads or country back lanes. North of Kapunda, Peters Hill must be negotiated before heading east to the Tothill Range which is followed to Logans Gap. Here the nature of the walk changes again as the track crosses steeply undulating treeless exposed hills to bring the walker to Burra-a town of considerable historic interest.

Beyond Burra walking is again very demanding as the trail rises and falls precipitately over steep treeless hills, slavishly following fence lines and denying all attempts or desire to adhere to contours. As with much of the walk, water is scarce and adequate reserves must always be carried - indeed the trail now heads east into country which could only be perceived as semi-mallee as it approaches Touralie Gorge. Through the rock of this rugged pass, pioneer track-makers have carved a route for the bullock wagons to cart produce to Adelaide.



The next challenge is Mt Bryan, another demanding climb to its 936 m summit before descending down the Toolang Valley to Hallett. Curnows Hut Then more hard exposed walking following old stone fences which traverse the ridgeline of the Brown Hill Range, finally dropping into the Spalding Valley where the trail suddenly becomes easy following the now disused aqueduct which formerly collected water for Whyalla.

Spalding is by-passed but there is a pleasant campsite at Freshwater Weir on the aqueduct. Many more kilometers beside the aqueduct lead to the Bundaleer Reservoir (not seen from the track) and on to the Never Never Creek valley with its own unique rugged beauty, passing Yandowie Station (grazing) before entering a forest of exotic trees in which Curnows Hut is situated. More hard walking ahead over steep open grazing land with some superb views ranging from Mt Remarkable

and the Flinders Ranges north to St Vincents and Flinders Gulfs west. There is now an opportunity to take a 2 km spur track to a property called Wirrilla, where accommodation in the shearers' quarters is available, before embarking on the impending long trudge via Georgetown, over the Rocky River to Crystal Brook.

- c) There is now a dramatic change in the trail. A road bash takes you to Bowman Park from where the track follows the lovely valley of Crystal Brook to Hughes Gap. A long ascent of some 600 m partly along rural roads, more along a remote 4WD track, leads to The Bluff, 750 m directly above the shore line of Flinders Gulf, and festooned with TV towers. View from The Bluff This is densely timbered country and the trail next leads steeply down into the Wirrabara Forest before returning steeply to a ridgeline at Frypan Hill and the Go Cart track. Another steep descent leads to a densely timbered valley and the track then climbs intimately up a lush and bushy creek to regain the pine forest.



Beyond the Wirrabara Forest is a long slog following 'green' roads to reach the historic village of Melrose. The reward for this bash is the sight of Mt Remarkable looming closer. The ascent of Mt Remarkable is spectacular - formerly brutally steep and abrupt, a new brilliantly graded foot track traverses a number of enormous scree slopes in its 6 km journey to the summit (named by James Eyre in 1840), but there are no views from the top.

A long undulating ridge-top fire trail leads to the old copper mine at Spring Creek and the trail then follows this beautiful valley with its magnificent red gums for a couple of km before a very steep climb to another fire trail leading to Stony Creek and a campsite. Recently the Friends of the Heysen Trail have been installing 'shelters' and water tanks in this northern section, and at some sites toilets are also being constructed - but the 'shelters' are merely a means of collecting rainwater and provide no shelter for walkers in bad weather.

North of Horrocks Pass a long, undulating ascent takes the walker to the top of Mt Brown (940 m), first climbed by members of Flinders' team aboard Investigator in 1802. From here to the end at Parachilna Gorge, the trail passes through dry but consistently spectacular country with massive craggy ranges such as Dutchmans Stern or Mt Arden, crossing open saltbush plains to gain the central Flinders Ranges, following the mighty Elder range. Dry, rocky creek beds are followed and Wilpena Pound is crossed before reaching the old Aroona homestead site and continuing between the Heysen and the ABC Ranges to reach the end at Parachilna Gorge.

Many whose bushwalking 'thing' is the heavily forested country of Victoria and NSW might be dismissive of this truly great long distance trail. It is by no means easy, but it has been well marked, and for the most part signage is excellent and not obtrusive. The availability of water remains a problem and many parts are accessible only to 4WD vehicles, way beyond any public transport. Those who walk it should accept it for what it is - a representation of what the greater part of Australia happens to be - arid, sparsely settled, grossly and indiscriminately overcleared and now overstocked, quite unforgiving but possessed of a huge variety of beauty which is uniquely Australian.

Ted Fleming