

Nilpena Ediacara National Park

FACTSHEET – July 2022



HISTORY

- Nilpena Ediacara National Park extends to Lake Torrens National Park and has several permanent springs and extensive creek lines where middens provide evidence of the area's significance to the Adnyamathanha People who are the native title holders of the area.
- Renowned South Australian geologist and creator of the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary, the late Reg Sprigg AO, first discovered fossils in the Ediacara Hills in 1946, which are at the northern end of Nilpena Ediacara National Park.
- In the 1980's, Ross Fargher leaseholder of Nilpena Pastoral Station, found Ediacaran fossils on his recently-acquired property when a family friend noticed ripple rocks of the ancient sea floor used as the flooring of Nilpena's woolshed.
- One of Nilpena's most superbly preserved beds, known as Alice's Restaurant Bed, was unearthed in 2016 by leading paleontologist Dr Mary Droser and her team. The bed contains many rare species, with evidence depicting the seafloor was once a habitat and complex environment where there was activity of mobility, feeding and reproduction.
- In March 2019, the State government purchased 59,658 hectares from the Nilpena Pastoral Company for the protection of Nilpena's fossils. The purchase is the largest addition to South Australia's parks system in 10 years.
- The land includes all fossil-bearing hills and three historic buildings at Nilpena station. Purchase was made possible with funding from a number of philanthropic sources including the Flinders Ranges Ediacara Foundation.
- Nilpena Ediacara National Park was proclaimed on 17 June 2021.
- Management of the park will protect and preserve the fossil specimens while permitting ongoing research and access for small visitor groups.
- Stewardship of the fossils and their ongoing protection is key to the management of the National Park. For this reason, it will not permit free and independent access to move around the National Park beyond, in the future, the pastoral visitor precinct. There are precedents for this both here and overseas to protect significant fossil heritage sites.
- The park is currently closed and is slated for an opening in the first half of 2023.

NILPENNA'S SIGNIFICANCE

- Nilpena Ediacara National Park is considered as one of the world's most important fossil sites due to the unique state of preservation of the early record of animal life (known as the Ediacaran) evidenced by on-site research undertaken over the past 30 years. Significant published research by the University of California, Riverside, and ongoing involvement by the South Australian Museum, has been key to understanding the significance of the site.
- It is recognised as the richest and most diverse Ediacaran fossil site on Earth, and has revolutionised our understanding of this remarkable time in Earth's history. It has featured in documentaries by Sir David Attenborough.
- In the park's unassuming hills, an ancient seafloor containing strange early lifeforms some half a billion years old have been exquisitely preserved in the fine sandstone grain.

WORLD HERITAGE POTENTIAL

- The Australian Government placed the Flinders Ranges on Australia's Tentative List for World Heritage in April 2021 and the international significance of Nilpena's fossil discoveries are fundamental in securing a formal listing slated for 2025.
- The World Heritage nomination of the Flinders Ranges will contain two sites on Nilpena Ediacara National Park, being the excavated Nilpena fossil site and the Ediacara Hill.
- Nilpena will continue to be a working research site with discoveries promoting science as a key part of reinforcing the ongoing need to protect and care for Nilpena.

THE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY

- The visitor experience at Nilpena Ediacara National Park will be a world first in having an AV experience to bring to life the ancient sea floor half a billion years ago.
- The South Australian government is currently creating visitor facilities at Nilpena Ediacara National Park to showcase an Ediacaran fossil experience that will explain the planet's early stages of animal life.
- Nilpena's former Blacksmith's Shop is being repurposed to provide an 'all-access' immersive fossil experience where visitors can view the relocated Alice's Restaurant Bed (the most important fossil bed).
- A state-of-the-art AV experience has been created using 3D realistic animation technology (supported by the best lighting conditions) and visitor will see the fossils come to life.
- Guided tours to the Nilpena Ediacara National Park fossil field will also form part of the visitor experience. Access paths and a viewing platform have been installed to ensure sustainable access to key sites. Given the sensitivity of this working research site, a high level of accreditation will be required to access the fossil site.
- Nilpena Ediacara National Park visitor facilities have been designed using universal design principles to ensure people with a disability can have access to the site and can be included in the visitor experience.
- Commercial tour operators are to consider people with a disability in their guided tour operations in the park.
- The Department for Environment and Water is currently in the process of developing a tourism model to guide visitor access to Nilpena Ediacara National Park once it is opened.
- The model will be developed in consultation with the tourism industry and will be trialed once the park is open and fine-tuned over time. Tourism Accelerator is assisting the Department with the development of the tourism model.
- Once open, access to the park will be restricted to guided tours only. The park will not be accessible for the free and independent travelers nor contain overnight facilities for visitors e.g. camping or built accommodation.
- Nilpena's landscape is also used for filming television and movies including the iconic 2002 film *Rabbit Proof Fence* and continues to be used, as recently as 2021.

ACCESS TO NILPENA

- The park is located on the western margins of the Flinders Ranges adjacent to Lake Torrens, 540 km north of Adelaide in South Australia. When the park opens, it can be accessed via the Outback Highway 30 minutes north of Parachilna and 40 minutes south of Leigh Creek.
- Access is by tour operator only – there is a locked gate which is a necessary security strategy for protecting the fossils.

FUTURE PLANS

- For ongoing research and interpretation, a conservation management plan and stabilisation project is slated for the fossil beds to ensure the ongoing protection of this extraordinary site.
- Refurbishment of the former Shearer's Quarters' will be undertaken and used as accommodation for researchers.
- Restoring the former Woolshed is an opportunity that will be pursued to complement the visitor experience and may lead to use for functions and events.

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