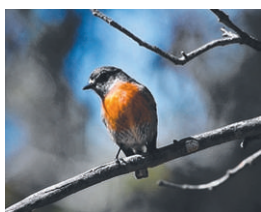




RICKY FRENCH



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TOM HUNTLEY

edic, which is another accommodation option for trail hikers. I feel a bit guilty, but it's a chance to relax, read about the isolated lives of the original lighthouse families, and sleep well in a soft bed, despite the worrying nature of the back door warning to keep it shut in case of snakes.

Next morning back on the trail I encounter a plump tiger snake, prompting an impromptu backpedal at an astonishing speed for someone carrying a 16kg pack. Later I share the trail with a kangaroo and her joey. Trackside an echidna is digging a hole to China (and I'm reminded of the interesting fact that a baby echidna is called a puggle). A thick stick beside the track reveals itself to be a leathery goanna, which flicks a speculative tongue into the air but is otherwise unperturbed by my presence. From the lady finger orchid poking up a few centimetres above the ground to the wedge-tailed eagle overhead, there is so much to look at that it's easy to forget it's a 61km hike.

Lunchtime means a quick diversion to the famous Remarkable Rocks. It's strange to suddenly be among throngs of tourists, but a clamber round the striking granite boulders makes it a lunch stop to remember. Then to

Maupertuis Bay, top left; Kangaroo Island's native inhabitants, top centre; Banksia Campsite, top right; scarlet robin, above

Banksia Campsite, wonderfully secluded and singing with birds. A short evening walk takes me to nearby Sanderson Bay, where Chris and Ira join me on the sand. Chris tells me they have seen seals on the rocks earlier that day. As the sun sets we watch angry waves pulverise the headland as the sky fades orange to purple, bathing the rockpools in soft, reflective light. We make our way back to camp under torch light and a sky silver with stars. It is a wonderful moment.

The dawn chorus wakes me early and I crawl out of my tent to find Chris already putting on a brew; we have a cuppa on the deck as the sun rises over the coastal hills and slowly warms our faces. Morning mist fills the gaps between headlands like the steam rising from our mugs. As the trail wanders inland, the vegetation changes from low coastal heath to taller mallee, before it hits the sand dunes leading to the South West River and Hanson Bay. An hour's walk upstream leads to Tea Tree Campsite for my last night. There is a sense civilisation is within reach, and you can take a short stroll to the historic Edward's Cottage, but if you close your eyes you can almost im-

agine the days when megafauna roamed the woodland. Fossils of these giant animals, including a 2000kg, big-nosed marsupial called *Diprotodon optatum*, and the fearsome, meat-eating mammal, *Thylacoleo carnifex*, have been found nearby at the trail's end point of Kelly Hill Caves.

But I can't keep my eyes closed for long imagining these fearsome creatures. I might miss something and I want to remember every critter I see along this quite remarkable trail.

Ricky French was a guest of Tourism South Australia.

Checklist

The five-day, four-night walk covers 61km and is recommended for experienced bushwalkers; ideal season, March to November. Conducted walks will also soon be available with approved operators. More: kangarooislandwildernesstrail.sa.gov.au. southaustralia.com



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