

# Beyond the purple haze

Lee Atkinson tackles the outback in style on a BMW road trip across the Flinders Ranges.

I had expected to see lots of wildlife in the Flinders Ranges, but not necessarily on my plate, which is piled high with barbecued kangaroo, emu and camel, marinated in bush herbs and native spices and slathered in wild bush tomato chutney. Here in the Flinders, bush tucker reigns supreme and tucking into the Australian coat of arms at meal times is nothing out of the ordinary, it seems.

Parachilna's hotel, the *Prairie*, is famous for it, its 'feral mixed grill' attracting crowds of diners to its rustic art-filled dining room each evening; its room is a favourite with visiting movie stars who often use the Flinders as a backdrop for films.

And it's easy to see why. The weathered peaks; red-rock gorges; dry creek beds lined with majestic white-barked river gums; dusty plains; dirt tracks; ruined farmhouses and lonely shearing sheds provide the quintessential Australian setting. This outback landscape is easy to get to and surprisingly accessible and the spiritual heart of the Flinders, Wilpena Pound, is little more than a five-hour drive from Adelaide.

## Ancient beauty

The real beauty of the Flinders, however, is that while it's remote and rugged, you don't need to be a

serious off-roader to explore the southern sections. *Signature Travel & Lifestyle* joined a BMW xDrive Safari – a convoy of brand new all-white all-wheel-drive soft-roaders incorporating the entire X-series, from the compact X1, the mid-size X3 and larger X5 SUVs to the sporty X6 coupe – and all four vehicles proved that you don't have to give up city comfort, sustainability and street smarts to tackle the outback.

Water is scarce in the Flinders, and although flash flooding occasionally rips through the area, most of the creeks are perennially dry, forming the tracks that crisscross the ranges. We spent two days exploring the many gorges that spear into the heart of these ancient mountains, swapping vehicles every few hours so we could have a turn behind the wheel of each.

At Brachina Gorge we followed a 20km trail that passes through 130 million years of Earth history, signposts along the way pointing out the geological age of the rocks, with rare yellow-footed rock wallabies bounding up the rock face as we trundled past. Whole hillsides are carpeted in wildflowers, and lookouts reveal the smudged purple peaks of the Heysen Range that shimmer on the horizon, making us feel we have just slipped inside the frame of a painter's famous watercolour. >





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- 01 BMW's X3 tackles the Flinders with ease
- 02 A break in the shearing at Arkaba's historic shed
- 03 Emus roam the hills in the national park
- 04 Sundowners with a view at Arkaba Station
- 05 In spring, the Flinders is carpeted in wildflowers
- 06 The BMW xSeries convoy hits the road
- 07 Guided wildlife spotting tours on Arkaba Station
- 08 Wildlife is prolific in the Flinders
- 09 Dining in style at Arkaba
- 10 Every track is an adventure in the Flinders

## Off-road performance

On the very aptly-named Moralana Scenic Drive we skirted along the dramatic ramparts of the southern wall of Wilpena Pound and climbed up and over the Elder Range. Then we tackled some of the more challenging trails to mountain-top lookouts on Arkaba Station, thankful not only for the high clearance of the X-series but also for the magic Hill Descent Control (HDC) button, which holds the vehicle steady at a pre-determined speed, helping with the job of brake control so we can concentrate on our white-knuckle steering – and soaking up the magnificent scenery.

The tracks are dusty and rocky, and notoriously hard on tyres. The BMWs don't come with spares; instead they offer 'run flats', which means you can still drive with a flat for up to 150km at a speed of up to 80km/h. The idea is that the run flat will get you home or to a workshop, saving you the need to get down and dirty changing the tyre beside the road – and save space by not needing to carry a spare. It's great in the city but not so helpful out here when the X1 gets the inevitable puncture. Luckily we're travelling with a BMW back-up crew who managed to fix the problem, but if you were out here on your own, packing a spare would be a good idea.

While the tracks might be tough on tyres, the BMWs prove miserly on fuel: after two full days of spirited on-road and robust off-road driving all four vehicles, which were all diesel, used less than 10 litres per 100km. The cute little X1 comes in at an impressive 7.5 litres per 100km.

Our final stop is at the former copper mining town of Blinman, the highest town in South Australia, where we treated ourselves to a slice of quandong pie, made from tiny tart fruit that taste a bit like a cross between an apricot and a peach.

As we left the ragged peaks behind us on our way back to Adelaide, emus ushered their troops of striped chicks away from the roadside and kangaroos stared out at us from beneath the shade of gum trees. It's almost as if they knew what we'd had for dinner the night before. ●



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**Getting there:** Wilpena Pound is 443km north of Adelaide, via Quorn.

**Where to stay:** Arkaba Station, [www.arkabastation.com](http://www.arkabastation.com);  
Prairie Hotel, Parachilna, [www.prairiehotel.com.au](http://www.prairiehotel.com.au);  
Wilpena Pound Resort, [www.wilpenapound.com.au](http://www.wilpenapound.com.au)