

Onkaparinga River National Park 1544ha and Recreation Park 284ha



The Onkaparinga River – South Australia’s second longest – flows through two very different parks on its journey to the sea, creating a contrast of gullies, gorges and wetlands.

In Onkaparinga River National Park, diverse hiking trails take you to cliff tops with magnificent views, or down to permanent rock pools teeming with life. You’ll see rugged ridge tops and the narrow river valley of the spectacular Onkaparinga Gorge.

The park protects some of the finest remaining pockets of remnant vegetation in the Southern Adelaide region. Areas of the park were used as farmland for many years, so you can also discover heritage-listed huts and the ruins of houses built in the 1880s. Wherever you go, you’ll be among native wildlife such as birds, koalas, kangaroos and possums - you may even spot an echidna.

In Onkaparinga Recreation Park, the river spills onto the plains, creating wetland ponds and flood plains. The area conserves important fish breeding habitat and hundreds of native plant and animal species, many of which are rare. The Onkaparinga River estuary also provides habitat for endangered migratory birds.

The recreation park is popular with people of all ages and interests. You can go fishing in the river, wander along the wetland boardwalks, ride a bicycle on the shared use trails, walk your dog (on a lead), kayak the calm waters or just be at peace with nature.

From the rugged gorge to the river plains, the Onkaparinga River parks provide a natural corridor for wildlife moving from the natural and recovering landscapes, downriver to the wetland estuary, abundant with life.

Opening hours

The Onkaparinga River parks are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The parks are closed on days of catastrophic fire danger. We advise that you avoid visiting on days of severe or extreme fire danger.

Contact

Emergency: 000

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Getting there

The parks are located 35km south of Adelaide. Access the recreation park from River Road, Noarlunga Downs and from Commercial and Sauerbiers Roads, Seaford Meadows. The main walking trails in the national park are on the northern side of the gorge from Piggott Range Road. See the park map for further detail.

You can get to the Onkaparinga River parks by public transport, visit adelaidemetro.com.au.

Fees

There are no fees to enter Onkaparinga River National Park and Onkaparinga River Recreation Park.

When to visit

Visit the Onkaparinga River parks at any time of year and you'll find something fun to do while you're out enjoying nature.

Walking, kayaking and cycling (designated trails only) are perfect activities all year round in the recreation park, and you can toss a line in the river at any time – the fish don't mind if it's raining.

In the national park you'll see impressively rugged scenery on the many and varied trails. In spring the bush is transformed into a spectacular display of wildflowers including many rare species. If you're an experienced climber, visit the rock-climbing area and scale the cliff faces that tower over the river.

Traditional owners

Translated from the Kaurna language, 'Ngangk' means women, 'Pari' means river, and 'ngka' means location. So the correct translation for Onkaparinga is Ngangkiparingka, which means women only places along the river.

There were many Kaurna yarta (land) family groups in the traditional areas that have been recognised as Kaurna pangkara (country), and also along the plains and hills south of Crystal Brook and west of Mount Lofty to Cape Jervis.

Many local place names such as 'Onkaparinga', 'Noarlunga' and 'Willunga' have their origins in Kaurna language.

Things to see and do

Rangers recommend:

- Taking the Hardy's Scrub Hike – this patch of scrub is a very important conservation area with excellent diversity and high quality native vegetation.
- Discovering heritage-listed huts and ruins of houses that were built in the 1880s on the Echidna Trail.
- Relaxing with friends and family at one of the gorgeous picnic areas in the park – some offer barbeques, toilets and shelter, and all are close to great trails.
- Kayaking the Onkaparinga River from Old Noarlunga through the recreation park to the mouth of the river at Port Noarlunga.
- Hiking in the eastern end of the national park in late winter/spring to discover the amazing display of wildflowers and birdlife.
- Taking your family on the Wetlands Loop Trail in the recreation park – it's bike, pram and dog friendly (on lead), with great views of the river and a boardwalk over the wetlands.
- Walking to the Sundews Lookout in the national park for spectacular views of the Onkaparinga Gorge.



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Bird watching

You'll see all kinds of birdlife in the Onkaparinga River parks, particularly if you take a few moments to be still. There are over 190 species that live in, or visit, the parks – many of conservation significance. Hunting birds, such as the peregrine falcon, scour the landscape in search of birds, small mammals and lizards. You'll probably hear the yellow-tailed black cockatoo long before you see one, their raucous cries announce their presence well in advance.

Down on the flats, the white-faced heron, great egret and royal spoonbill are commonly seen feeding in the estuary. Many birds migrate from the northern hemisphere to escape the arctic winter. Every Australian summer they come from Siberia, China and Japan to feed.



Fishing

All manner of marine life breeds and thrives in the clean environment of the recreation park estuary. This popular fishing haven attracts many keen anglers, fishing the waters for mulloway, jumping mullet, black bream, and yellow-eye mullet. There have been about 20 fish species recorded in the estuary and river.

Canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding

The estuarine waters of the recreation park are a perfect environment for canoeing, kayaking and paddle boarding. Beginners feel safe learning to paddle in the calm waters of the river between Main South Road and Commercial Road. Whether you're a beginner or an expert, you'll love the scenery as the river meanders through floodplains and wetlands on its way to the sea. There are many spots along the river suitable for launching your craft, but remember the estuary is tidal so it can get shallow and muddy at low tide.

Picnics

There are many spots for an informal picnic in the Onkaparinga River parks. If you're walking in the national park, just pick your favourite view or river rock and make yourself comfortable.

There are several more formal picnic areas in the park, with amenities, free barbecues and lovely views. Try the swing bridge, at the start of the Old Noarlunga Hike (gate 1). It's charming, picturesque, and there's a playground nearby.

Next to gate 25 you'll find a shady picnic ground with shelters, amenities, and free barbeques. It's tucked in behind one of South Australia's best known wineries, so you can pick up a fine bottle of red to pair with your meal.

Cycling

Jump on your bike and feel the wind in your hair on the shared use trails in the recreation park. It's an enjoyable ride for the whole family. The surfaces are even and obstacle free, and you'll have lovely views of the river. Because these trails are shared, always keep an eye out for others. Generally cyclists give way to foot traffic, but please be considerate of all users at all times.

Walking your dog

Why not bring a picnic with you and take your dog for a walk along the trails in the recreation park? Always make sure your dog remains under your control on a lead (for conservation reasons, and for the safety of others).

Mobile phone coverage

Mobile phone coverage can be patchy and unreliable in remote areas, especially if you are in the gorge or gully. To get a signal you may have to walk to one of the higher areas in the park.

Park maps on your mobile

Download free maps of this park for your mobile device from Avenza PDF Maps while you have mobile phone coverage. Used within the app, the maps allow you to calculate distances and locate yourself within the park (GPS coverage required).

**No internet?
No worries.**



Our maps are geo-enabled meaning you will always have your location dot no matter where you are*

*when used in conjunction with the FREE Avenza app and smart phone

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Walking

Walk (easy)

A walk is accessible to people of all ages and fitness levels. These are well-defined trails, generally less than 3km in length, with even surfaces.

Wetlands Loop Trail. Follow the eastern bank of the Onkaparinga River where you'll see two freshwater ponds. They support a variety of wildlife such as birds, frogs and fish, and some uncommon plant species. The wetlands loop is very accessible for families with strollers and for small children.
Access via gates 12 & 14 (RP) River Rd Noarlunga Downs.

1.5 hours 4.5km

Pingle Farm Trail. This trail takes you past a ruined farmhouse. Once the home of early settlers, it reminds us of their lives and work. You'll also pass the Encounter Marine Park Sanctuary.
Access via gate 10 (RP) Commercial Rd Seaford Meadows.

2 hours 4.5km return

These walks are on a shared pathway. Please be respectful of other users. Cyclists must slow down and give way to walkers. Dogs must be on a lead.

Hike (moderate)

A moderate hike is suitable for bushwalkers with an average level of fitness. These trails can be any length and may include moderate inclines and irregular surfaces.

Echidna Hike. A narrow trail takes you over moderate slopes and through lovely pink gum, grey box and sheoak bushland. Enjoy the winter and spring floral displays, including stunning orchids. You will see some ruins, get great views of the gorge, and get a good workout.
Access via gate 12 (NP) Piggott Range Rd Onkaparinga Hills.

2 hours 3.5km return

Nature Hike. An easy trail through regenerating pink gum and grey box woodland. This trail is a fine example of these unique plant communities. On the eastern section of the trail you'll have fabulous views of the gorge.
Access via gate 12 (NP) Piggott Range Rd Onkaparinga Hills.

2 hours 3.5km return

Hardy's Scrub Hike. This patch of native vegetation is a very important conservation area with excellent diversity of plants created by the varied soils. Grey box grows in fertile loam or clay soils, pink gums prefer soils with a sandy well drained surface and a clay or rocky base. Southern cypress pine grows only in sandy loam soil.
Access via gate 16 (NP) Chapel Hill Rd Blewitt Springs.

2 hours 4km return

Sundews Ridge Hike. Take a short hike to the Sundews lookout to see the rocky outcrops and the river flowing through the Onkaparinga Gorge. Sundews Ridge Hike is a moderate loop trail that runs along the ridge top, returning to the car park without descending to the river.
Access via gate 11 (NP) Piggott Range Rd Onkaparinga Hills.

2 hours 4km return

Hike (hard)

A hard hike requires some hiking experience and a reasonable

Old Noarlunga Hike. Cross the swinging bridge to start this trail. You'll discover the re-vegetation that is returning this once heavily grazed land to its original state. There are extensive views over the township of Old Noarlunga and the Onkaparinga River estuary.
Access via wing bridge, Paringa Parade Old Noarlunga.

2.5 hours 3.2km return

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fitness level, as some sections of the trail can be quite steep and uneven.

Tatendi Hike. Walk across the gentle slopes of the upper gorge for great views. From there, narrow rough trails descend steeply to the river where the vegetation becomes thicker and more diverse.
Access via *gate 25 (NP) Chaffeys Rd McLaren Vale.*

4 hours

3.5km
return

Sundews River Hike. Experience the river, and the plants and animals that live in the gorge. This is a hard hike that descends steeply from the lookout to the bottom of the gorge. You'll follow the river downstream for a short distance before returning up the steep slopes of the gorge to the ridge and the car park.
Access via *gate 11 (NP) Piggott Range Rd Onkaparinga Hills.*

4 hours

4.5km
return

Some sections of these trails are not well defined, particularly along the river. Hiking experience required.

Please take care on the trails during winter. The river is deep and fast-flowing and should not be crossed.

Time is generously estimated for an average walking speed of 2km per hour – allow extra time for resting and sightseeing.



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Know before you go

Every national park is different. Each has its own challenging environment and it is important to understand how to stay safe while enjoying all the park has to offer. Please note:

- dogs are permitted in the recreation park only and must be on a short lead at all times
- no dogs or bikes are permitted in the national park
- do not bring generators, chainsaws, firearms or motorcycles into the park
- leave the park as you found it, take your rubbish with you
- respect geological and heritage sites
- you may not remove native plants
- be considerate of other park users.

Fire safety

The Onkaparinga River National Park is closed on days of catastrophic fire danger. Listen to your local radio station for broadcasts, or call the CFS Hotline on 1300 362 361.

- All fires (wood, solid fuel, liquid and gas) are prohibited at all times in the recreation park.
- Gas and liquid fires only are permitted in designated areas in the national park other than on days of total fire ban.

Walking safety

- Wear sturdy shoes, a hat and sunscreen.
- There is no drinking water in the national park, so carry enough to be self-sufficient.
- Take your mobile phone, and when possible take a friend.
- If walking alone, tell someone where you're going and when you expect to be back.
- Make sure you have appropriate wet weather clothing. In wet conditions do not attempt to cross the river, and be aware that the river can flood. Trails can be very slippery after heavy rainfall.
- Trails in the recreation park are shared use, please be respectful of other users at all times.
- Where possible, stay on designated trails.

Snakes

There are snakes in the park but a snake will not harm you intentionally. Keep an eye out for them on trails on fine mild days in spring and autumn. They are generally shy creatures and prefer to keep clear of human contact.

Phytophthora (root-rot fungus)

Phytophthora (fy-TOFF-thora), otherwise known as root-rot fungus, is killing our native plants and threatens the survival of animals depending on plants for food and shelter. This introduced pathogen can be found in plant roots, soil and water. Please help stop the spread by staying on tracks and trails and by complying with all *Phytophthora* management signs.

Friends of Onkaparinga Park

FOOP is a community-based group of volunteers who work with park staff to conserve and rehabilitate the natural and cultural heritage in the park. They also assist with the maintenance of park infrastructure and facilities. FOOP work on a diverse range of conservation based activities and projects, and have a great time doing it. Find them at communitywebs.org/OnkaparingaParks. Learn more about volunteering in parks at parks.sa.gov.au.

