

Para Wirra Conservation Park 1507ha



With its extensive grassy areas, relaxing lakeside, and beautiful bush setting, Para Wirra Conservation Park is a well-loved gathering place for family and friends.

This is a perfect park for immersing yourself in nature – for walking, picnicking, and observing native animal life. The park is also home to the Barossa Goldfields, where you can discover the ruins and the history of a once thriving mining operation.

There are over 100 species of birds living in the park, including the cheeky emu you'll see patrolling the picnic grounds. You can see kangaroos grazing at dawn and dusk, and on a warm day bearded dragons and sleepy lizards bask in the sunshine. If you're in luck you might also spot a short-beaked echidna, a shy creature whose diggings can be found throughout the park.

Opening hours

Para Wirra Conservation Park is open every day from 8am to sunset (except Christmas Day). The park may be closed on days of extreme fire danger, or for other park management reasons (see Fire Safety).

Getting there

The park is located 40km north east of Adelaide. Access is via Humbug Scrub Road, One Tree Hill.

Fees

Fees apply to enter Para Wirra Conservation Park in a vehicle. Failure to display a valid permit on the designated vehicle may result in a fine. Buy entry permits at the self-registration station as you enter the park. You will need the correct change.

You can check visitor fees and buy park passes online at parks.sa.gov.au.

When to visit

Para Wirra Conservation Park is great at any time of year. In the warmer months, the park is the perfect spot for picnics, barbecues, to take a leisurely stroll or play a game of cricket on the bush oval. Winter is the best time to attempt the more challenging hikes, and it is also marvellous for wildflowers.

Traditional owners

The three nations connected to Para Wirra are the Peramangk, Ngadjuri and Kaurna nations. Tapering gradually to meet the Barossa Valley and the mallee plains, the rugged Mount Lofty Ranges and South Para River form a natural meeting place for the Kaurna people across the Adelaide plains; the Peramangk people to the east; and the Ngadjuri people to the north.

Translated from the Kaurna language, 'Para' (really Pari) means river, creek or gully. 'Wirra' means forest. So Para Wirra is the forest where a waterway (river or creek) flows. Today, Para Wirra Conservation Park is an important area for all three nations, and National Parks are working with them to develop and promote cultural interpretation of the park.

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Things to see and do

Rangers recommend:

- Learning about the fascinating history of the Barossa Goldfields as you walk through a once thriving gold mining area.
- Stopping at the quaint Bowden Cottage Museum to learn even more about the gold mines and the challenging lives of those who worked them.
- Visiting the park in spring when the bush comes alive with lilies and orchids attracting a wide variety of birdlife and native bees.
- Enjoying the magnificent views out across the park, and down into spectacular deep gorges, from the ridge of the Devils Nose Track.
- Playing a game of cricket or football on the bush oval, then cooking a barbecue in the Gawler View picnic area.
- Riding your horse along picturesque bush tracks through the southern end of the park.
- Walking your dog (on a lead) around the shores of the lake.

Bird life

Para Wirra Conservation Park can be a noisy place! You will hear raucous cries of wattlebirds when the gums and wattles are flowering and see brightly coloured galahs and lorikeets in the tree canopies. You'll hear the strange and unique drumming sound emus make as they wander through the picnic grounds (watch out for your food or they will try to steal it from you, and please do not feed them). And you'll hear smaller birds, like the Scarlet Robin, Blue Wren and Eastern Spine Bill, making their busy rustling noises as they go about their business in the shrubs, small trees and closer to the ground.

Barbecues and picnics

Para Wirra Conservation Park is a perfect spot for group and family gatherings, with accessible facilities in a natural bushland setting. The lake is one of the park's most popular areas, there's a barbecue area and picnic tables with a view out over the water. On a calm day you'll see the surrounding bushland reflected in the water with mirror-like perfection.

The Gawler View picnic area is a huge, open Conservation space with an oval and a flat grassy area near the barbecues. There are shelters, toilets with disabled access, and even a playground for the little ones. The Wirra picnic area also has free barbecues and amenities with disabled toilet access.

Horse riding

At the southern end of the park you can bring your horse in for a ride along unspoiled bush tracks. There are horse entry points on Humbug Scrub Road, Bassnet Road and Frank Barker Road. Humbug Scrub Road car park has an area large enough to turn a horse float around. Please note that horses are not allowed on the walking trail along Mack Creek. See the park map for riding tracks.

Phytophthora dieback is killing many native plant species, and threatens the survival of animals depending on plants for food and shelter. Horses and riders can spread the disease through plant material that sticks to hooves, boots, bandages or boot covers. Please read and follow the guidelines in the hoof hygiene brochure (parks.sa.gov.au) before riding in the park.

Barossa Goldfields

Gold was discovered here in the 1860s and although a number of mining syndicates invested heavily, they did not make their fortunes. Small scale mining continued in the area until the mid-1930s and many remains of mining activity can be seen throughout the northern end of the park.

Interpretative walks take you past many points of interest, and you can visit Bowden Cottage, a museum run by the Barossa Goldfields Historical Society dedicated to the goldmining days.

Visit communitywebs.org/BarossaGoldfieldsHistoric for opening hours. Please note that fossicking is not permitted in Para Wirra Conservation Park.



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Walking

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.

Hissey Loop Walk

Walk along the shaded valley of Wild Dog Creek and look for the gnarled and twisted gum trees. Then take in the scenery as you meander around the tranquil Lake. Ideal for families or visitors with limited time.

Access: near the lake access road (east side).

1 hour 2 km loop

Victoria Hill Walk

Discover the secret remains of this historical mining town in the Barossa Valley. Allow time to stop and read the interpretive signs along the route that tell the colourful story of the Barossa Goldfields.

Access: car park on Allendale Road near Bowden Cottage.

45 minutes 1.5 km loop

Lizard Rock Nature Walk

An enjoyable loop trail with easy grades and picturesque views across Wild Dog Creek valley. Explore the rock formations along the ridge and see if you can spot the Lizard Rock! Great for family groups.

Access: near the Gawler View Barbecue and Natureplay areas.

45 min 1.6 km return

The Knob Lookout Hike

Whether you walk to the Knob or ride/drive along Scenic Drive you'll find yourself overlooking valleys of bushland and the rocky outcrops along the South Para River. Once at the knob you will be in the centre of Para Wirra, surrounded by higher hills, miles away from city life.

Access: next to the shelter north of Gawler View Picnic Area.

Take the hike one way then return along Scenic Drive or via Lizard Rock Nature Walk, making it a loop. You can also access the Quarry Hike before you get to the top of the Knob for a longer walk in the bush.

Via Scenic Drive
Via Lizard Rock

2 hours 4.5 km
1.5 hours 3.2 km return

Quarry Hike

For an adventurous workout amongst nature, hike down to the South Para River and see what birds you can spot in the shaded gorge. Stop for a breather by the old goldmining Battery site beyond the steep climb, then make your way to Para Wirra Road (park boundary) for a stunning view across the valley.

Access: Quarry Track below The Knob Lookout.

2 hours 4 km one way
4 hours 8.4 km return

Devils Nose Hike

Take the ridge top hike to the Devils Nose. Sweeping views of the Barossa Range, Gawler District, South Para Gorge and Misery Farm will take your breath away. Bring your camera! The hike then continues north down into the valley where you join Quarry track and return via the Knob, Lizard Rock and the Lake (along sections of Lizard Rock and Hissey Trails). For those wanting a shorter option, return from Devil's Nose via the Devil's Nose Track. **Access:** car park and trailhead west of the lake.

Devils Nose and back (return)

Devils Nose, then loop via Lizard Rock and Hissey trails

2 hours 4.4 km return
4.5 hours 9.7 km loop

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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.

Mack Creek Hike

Follow Mack Creek downstream through a valley of magnificent river red gums in the Humbug Scrub section of the park. Look out for the beautiful orchids flowering in late winter and spring.

Access: Mack Creek car park, southern section of the park, off Humbug Scrub Road.

4 hours

7.5 km loop

Wirra Loop Hike

A delightful nature trail, great on its own, or as part of other trails in the Forestry SA network. Look for wildflowers year round and stop by the dam along Blue Gum Track to see the wildlife that comes to visit! **Access:** Wild Dog Creek car park, east of Para Wirra Drive and just south of Wirra Road.

2.5 hours

5 km loop

Access: Wild Dog Creek car park, east of Para Wirra Drive and just south of Wirra Road.

Phoenix Hike

Take a walk through time and see the major mines of the Barossa Goldfields. Follow the pickaxe symbols every 200 metres, reading the stories of early miners on interpretive signs along the way. Explore the old tramway tracks from Menzies Mine, near the Battery.

Access: car park on Allendale Road near Bowden Cottage.

2 hours

4.2 km loop

Lady Pearce Hike

Follow an old bullock track along a dramatic spur and take in the serenity of the South Para River. A superb walk going down, but a solid climb back up past the old goldfields Battery site.

Access: car park on Allendale Road near Bowden Cottage

3-4 hours

5 km loop

Time is generously estimated for an average walking speed of 2 km 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:

- do not swim or bathe in the lake, there are submerged objects just under the water and it can be unsafe
- keep your dog on a leash
- do not feed birds or other animals, it promotes aggressive behaviour and an unbalanced ecology
- do not bring generators, chainsaws or firearms into the park
- leave the park as you found it, take your rubbish with you
- abide by the road rules (maintain the speed limit) and keep to defined vehicle tracks
- respect geological and heritage sites
- do not remove native plants
- be considerate of other park users.

Fire safety

This park may be closed on days of extreme fire danger. Listen to your local radio station for broadcasts, or call the CFS Hotline on 1300 362 361.

- Wood fires and solid fuel fires are prohibited throughout the year.
- Gas fires are permitted in designated areas only (other than on days of total fire ban).
- Gas barbecues are available throughout the park, or you may bring your own gas barbecue.
- On total fire ban days the park may remain open, but the use of all barbecues is prohibited.

Bushwalking safety

- Keep to defined vehicle tracks and walking trails – don't try to take short cuts or wander off the trails (this is particularly important in the northern area of the park where there may be unfenced goldmine shafts).
- Always leave yourself plenty of time, particularly when walking down from the Goldfields area into the main body of the park. The return walk is very steep.
- Pay attention to the weather. Be extra careful in wet or extreme weather conditions, particularly when crossing the South Para River ford.
- Wear sturdy shoes, a hat and sunscreen. Make sure you have appropriate wet weather clothing.
- Carry enough food and drinking water to be self-sufficient. The hotter the conditions, the more water you will need.
- Do not rely on tanks or creeks in the park for drinking water.
- Carry a map of the park and the walks at all times.
- If you're planning a long walk, you should inform an emergency contact person who will know if you don't return at the designated time.

Mobile phone coverage

Mobile phone coverage can be patchy and unreliable in national parks, especially if you are in a low-lying area (such as a gorge or gully). To get a signal you may have to walk or drive to one of the higher areas in the park.

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 fungus 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.

Group visits

If you are planning to visit the park with a large group, please call us to discuss on (+61 8) 8523 7700. With advance notice we can make sure the park is sufficiently staffed for your visit.

Get involved

Friends of Para Wirra Conservation Park
communitywebs.org/parawirrafriends

Barossa Goldfields Historical Society
communitywebs.org/BarossaGoldfieldsHistoric

Walking Trails Support Group
walkingtrailssupportgroup.org.au

These three groups of community-based volunteers assist park staff to protect the natural features and cultural heritage of the park. New members with shared interests are always welcome.

You can also find out more about volunteering in parks at parks.sa.gov.au.

Contact

Emergency: 000

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