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Kangaroo Island. After the Fires. David Laing

The fires started in the West of Kangaroo Island on December 20th 2019 but spread rapidly when the temperature in Parndana topped 39 degrees Celsius and winds reached up to 80 kilometres per hour. Ninety percent of Kangaroo Island's timber plantations have been burned, including hundreds of acres of highly flammable eucalyptus. The total area destroyed by the Kangaroo Island bushfires now stands at 200,000 hectares which is almost half the island, the Country Fire Service has confirmed. Kangaroo Island tourism was expected to fetch \$168 million in 2020 but local businesses are concerned that one of the island's key industries is at risk of collapsing as tourists cancel bookings into this year. A force of 121 Australian Defence Force personnel from 9 Brigade were deployed to Kangaroo Island to help with immediate relief and to ensure locals could access clean drinking water. A further 60 CFS volunteer fire-fighters and their appliances were also sent to the island in the early stages to fight the fires.

To top that off, the Coronavirus hit Australia, and Kangaroo Island was forced into immediate lockdown, once again turning the islands populated areas into ghost towns.

We decided to take a trip over to see for ourselves what was happening since the island reopened for tourism. What we found was an island full of optimism, and very friendly residents. Everywhere we went we were welcomed with open arms, and nothing was too much for the people. It was sad to see so many empty shops in the towns, and some will never reopen, but those who are left are doing their utmost to ensure that their tourism industry will go into the future. We visited a number of venues and decided our "pay it forward" attitude would assist in some way. Make up your own minds about this wonderful place.

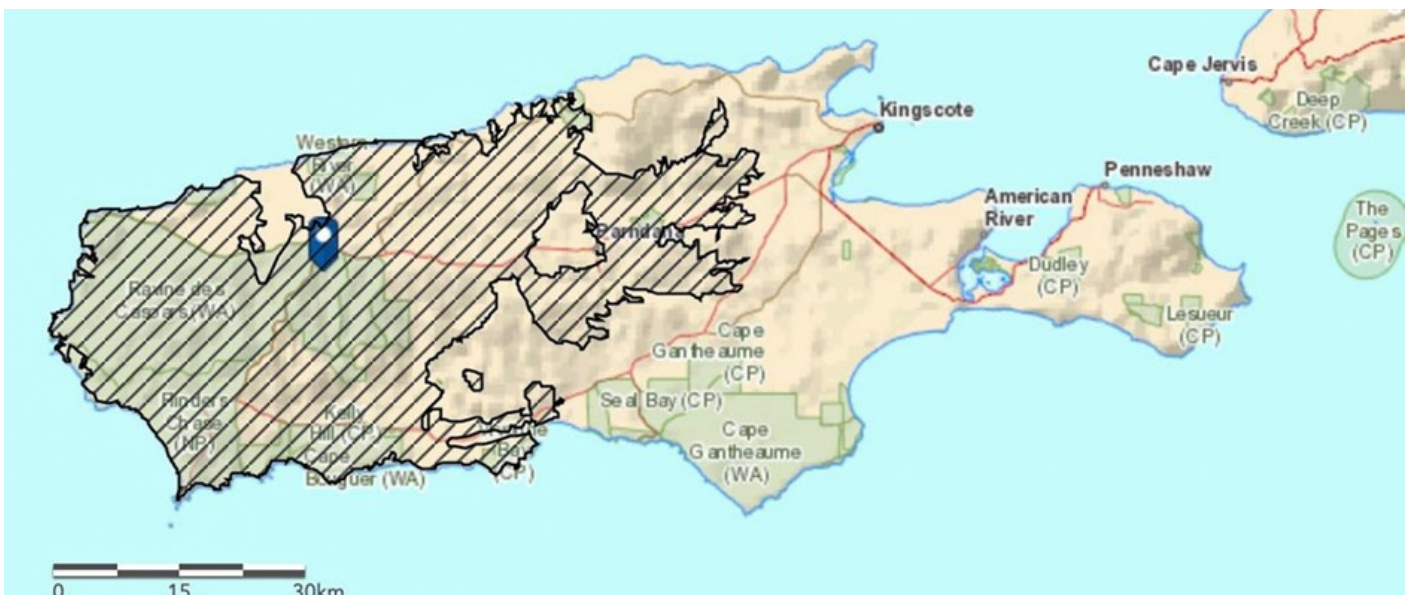


The Fires.



ABOVE: Taken from a Aerial Water Bomber this view shows the area west of Parndana on Day 5 of the fires. The fires had passed, heading East, leaving the landscape dead and blackened.

BELOW: A map of the island showing the extent of the devastation, (shaded area) from the West coast to more than 1/2 way across the island. It is evident that if not for the gallant efforts of the emergency services the fires could have claimed the entire island, which would have devastated the population for years.



The Fires



The two Ravine fires on Kangaroo Island on New Year's Day merged, creating new dangers. The single fire was burning in an east north/easterly direction towards the Duncan Fire, which was declared contained on Tuesday, December 31. A number of fires were started by lightning in December across Kangaroo Island.

The Country Fire Service (CFS), SA National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and local landholders worked hard to stop those fires spreading. The Duncan Fire on the northern side of the island was contained on Tuesday 31st December 2019. But, the two Ravine fires on the western end of the island remained uncontrolled and continued to present a threat to life and property.

The Ravine fires started approximately five kilometres apart in inaccessible scrubland south of Cape Borda Rd in the Ravine Des Casoars Wilderness Protection Area. Those fires merged and burnt 7528 ha, including large areas of wilderness area, private property and timber plantation. Due to local wind conditions, there was a significant amount of smoke in the area and current winds were pushing the smoke towards Kingscote and beyond to the mainland.

Due to the size and complexity of the fires and the terrain they were burning in, it was expected that the Ravine fire would continue to burn for a number of weeks. **They were contained 3 weeks later.** To ensure community and visitor safety, NPWS closed Flinders Chase National Park until further notice. It has only recently reopened. Changing weather conditions and lack of visibility



due to smoke decreased firefighting efforts. Strong winds and hot conditions made the firefighting tasks even more dangerous, and it was a miracle that only 2 lives were lost during the entire danger period.

Information and some photos in this edition have been sourced from the ABC, SACFS, Channel 7, Kangaroo Island Tourism websites, John & Carol Ali, and our own experiences and photos.

And then 9 Brigade arrived.



And then 9 Brigade arrived.



Before & After — Cape du Couedic Road



Nature gives the trees another chance.



The same area at the time of our visit. Line marking, signage and posts have been renewed.



Please don't abandon us!

Local business owner Chris Schumann said "What we want to tell the rest of Australia, and the rest of the world because the coverage for the fires has been international, 'don't abandon us, don't cancel, come to Kangaroo Island, it's a great experience still'.

"We understand the immediate cancellations, but it's the ones going forward that are an issue for everybody on Kangaroo Island.

"People have lost their farms, have lost their property but some of them have daughters, brothers, sisters who are working in the tourism industry.

He said people had been asking small operators, such as bed-and-breakfasts, for a refund on bookings over the next two months.

"When you've got two months, or three months, of cancellations and they're all wanting their money back, small operators cannot do that and it has a big impact on them," he said.

Premier Steven Marshall has urged tourists not to abandon Kangaroo Island.

"This is a very, very large landmass ... there's more than 2,500-square-kilometres which is pristine island and we want to get people over there as quickly as possible," he said.

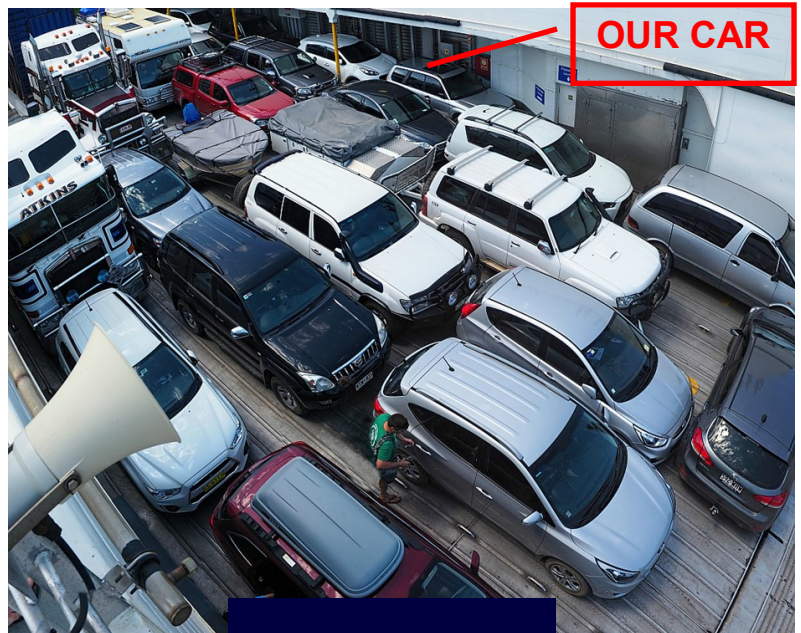
"We've got conservation and national parks that aren't open to the public and what we need to do is look at the feasibility of opening them up so we can create other attractions at the east end of the island, while we rebuild the west.

"We want to make sure what we end up with here, coming out of this tragedy on Kangaroo Island, is a stronger offer to the people.

"What we're already seeing is massive goodwill from people out there in the community — I've got a feeling that they will be booking holidays ... and supporting these communities."



So, that's what we did. We booked a nice hotel for 2 nights and headed over the 13 miles to Kangaroo Island aboard the mighty Sealink ferry. We wanted to see for ourselves how the recovery was going and how the people were coping after the fires and during the COVID-19 crisis.



Bunker Hill Lookout. Before & Now!



Kangaroo Island Now.



ABOVE: One of the signs I observed which adorn many shops in Kingscote. No other words are necessary. Our men and women of the ADF did us proud.

BELOW: The view from our room in American River. Thankfully the fires never got that far, although the owners and staff were prepared to evacuate at a seconds notice.



Raptor Domain Birds of Prey Experience



About 40 kms from Kingscote is the brilliant Raptor Domain Birds of Prey show. Raptor Domain delivers the only "In-Flight" Birds of Prey Display in South Australia, where you can meet an array of birds including Jedda the majestic Wedge-tailed Eagle. We enjoyed a delightful interactive experience with Casper the friendly Barn Owl, Banjo, Zak and Clancy the laughing Kookaburras and Jack the Raven, who made it his business to pick up litter and deposit it in the rubbish bin. This display is thought of by many to be the most interactive and educational Birds of Prey display they have seen, and I highly recommend a visit there. Their gift shop also sells some amazing pieces of local craft, and the outside paddocks abound with kangaroos and wallabies. Put it on your list!



Duck Lagoon & Emu Ridge - Eucalyptus Distilleries

About 4 years ago June and I camped off grid for a week at a lovely place called Duck Lagoon, near the centre of the Eastern part of the Island. A small out-of-the-way camping spot with flushing toilets, bonus! The area was the original



site of a eucalyptus distillery employing about 20 men and operated from 1906 up until the late 1950's, when competition from larger distilleries forced their closure. Large pieces of the original machinery can still be found around the area, along with educational storyboards, explaining the distilling process and it's history. But beware, the track from the Playford Highway should only be attempted during dry weather, and then only by 4WD. At one point there were over 60 eucalyptus distilleries on the island, but now only one remains, Emu Ridge.

The Emu Ridge Eucalyptus Oil distillery is a family owned business and a popular Kangaroo Island tourist attraction since 1991. They are the only commercial Eucalyptus Oil distillery in South Australia, and produce 100% pure Australian Eucalyptus Essential Oil that is unique to the world. Its produced from the Kangaroo Island Narrow Leaf Mal-lee (*Eucalyptus cneorifolia*) – along with a large range of natural products available through the farm gate retail shop, craft gallery and online store. They offer a self-guided tour of their small facility, and we were amazed at how simple the eucalyptus oil extraction process is. The term “One Man



Show” springs to mind, when we were told the owner, Larry Turner (pictured, centre) grows and nurtures the eucalyptus trees (bushes), slashes them when they reach 4 years of age, gathers, mulches and steams the leaves over a large “still” extracting pure eucalyptus oil, then bottles it for sale. The harvesting only takes place from Spring through to Autumn when the eucalyptus leaves contain the most oil, however the farm shop and distillery are open for tours all year round.

You can learn a lot from visiting places like this when you go to Kangaroo Island, and you will be made more than welcome everywhere you go.

The island is recovering from the fires, but they would love to see their economy kick-started with an influx of tourists.

You too can be some of those tourists!. Like they say, “Please don't abandon us!”

David Laing - Editor