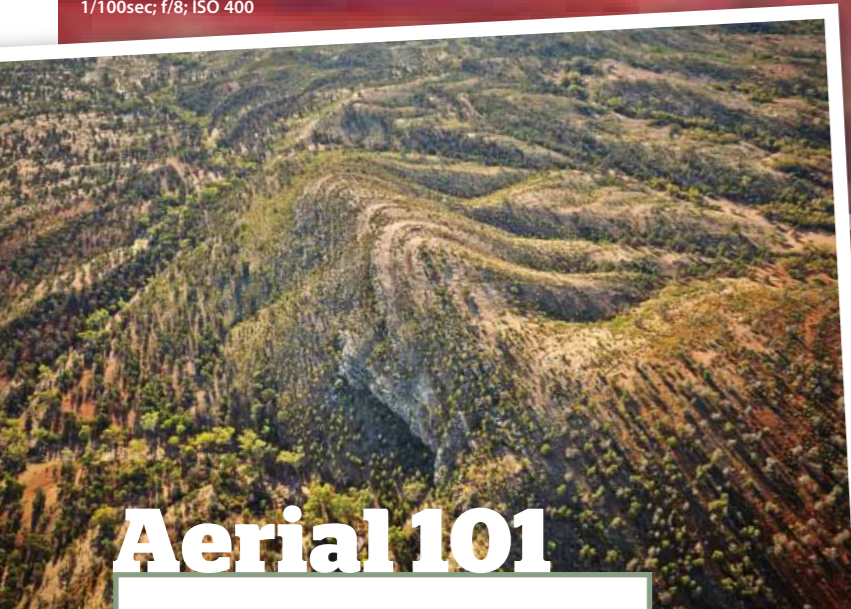


■ Deep Flinders sunset
5DMkII; 70-200mm lens;
1/100sec; f/8; ISO 400

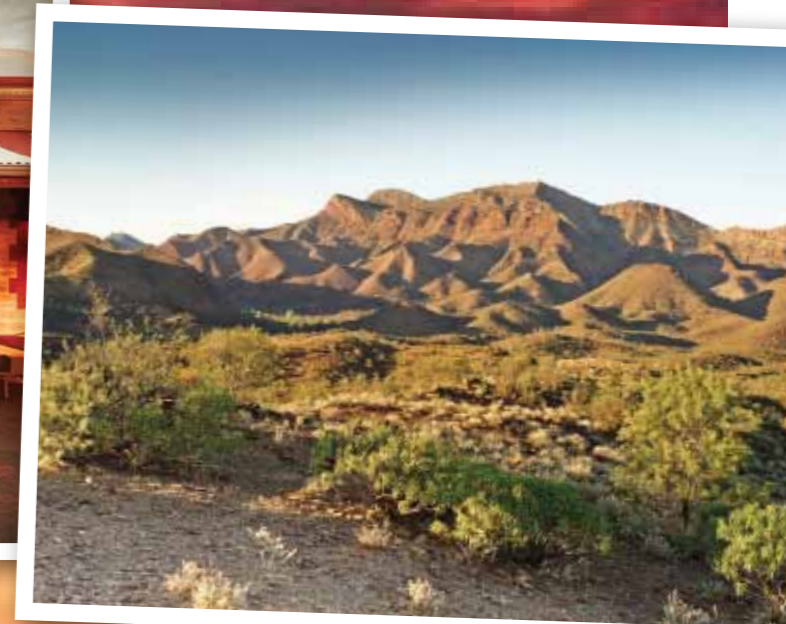
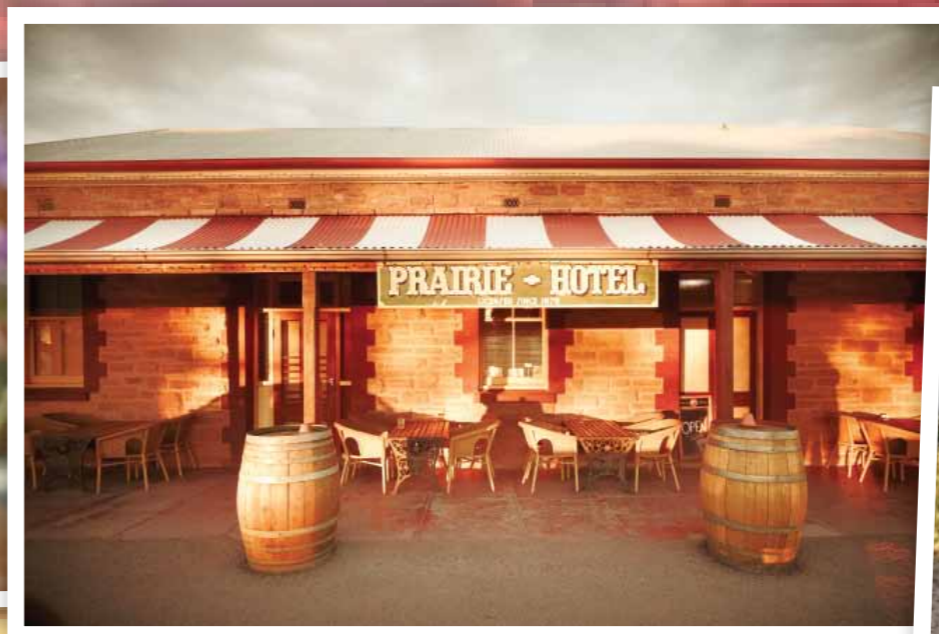


Aerial 101

Sky high in Blinman

Ian Fargher and his plane are available for photographic flights anywhere in the Flinders Ranges, operating out of his own strip near the town of Blinman. He's skilled at mustering livestock with his Cessna 172, so low-level buzzing over scenery is never a hassle.

AngorichinaStation.com.au



“The experience of shooting and exploring the Flinders is unique for every traveller”

POSTCARDS FROM FLINDERS

Quietly spoken treasures where the mountains meet the desert.

It's just gone 7pm and the last rays of sun are about to hide behind the distant hills. I've driven off the main road to follow a folly – a track that leads to the ruins of a small farming community. The dirt at my feet is red and sandy, the hills carpeted with spinifex grass, and every few hundred metres another mob of kangaroos is startled by the approach of my 4WD.

A track leads to the top of a small hill and I pause the vehicle to shoot a large boomer backlit by the sun. Most roos leap away at the first sound of a car; some just wait and watch. This large male is very patient and allows me to get out of the car, walk closer, and take more shots.

I only have a 70-200mm lens but it's good enough for the most patient of the marsupials.

These will be my best shots of the day. The sun is moving too fast and I reach the top of the hill a little too late to shoot the wide open views around me. Sometimes the joy of being a photographer is finding yourself in the middle of nowhere with a peaceful sky and nothing but your own thoughts to capture the moment. There will be plenty of great photos tomorrow anyway.

South Australia's Flinders Ranges National Park – which begins about 400km north of Adelaide – is filled

with these moments. It offers up a subtle landscape that challenges your composition. There are very few slam-dunks here; each lovely image must be patiently crafted from the landscape, as though the millions of years of tectonic movement that pushed all this geology to the surface is in no hurry to be mounted on someone's wall.

Hop to it

I'm especially pleased to have finished the day having captured a handful of kangaroos. Their presence in the park dominates the journey, partly because they're so beautifully adapted to this environment, partly because they »

» IMAGES

FOLDED FLINDERS

» (FAR LEFT) 5DMkII; 24mm lens; f/8; 1/125sec; ISO 800

BUSH TOMATO

» (MID LEFT) Pentax 645D; 55mm lens; 1/3200sec; f/2.8; ISO 200

PRAIRIE HOTEL

» (ABOVE LEFT) 5DMkII; 16-35mm lens; f/7.1; 1/100sec; ISO 1600

GLASS GORGE TRACK

» (ABOVE RIGHT) Pentax 645D; 55mm lens; f/10; 1/125sec; ISO 200



» IMAGES

EASTERN GREY KANGAROO

» (LEFT) 5DMkII; 70-200mm lens; 1/320sec; f/2.8; ISO 100

PARACHILNA BLOOM

» (RIGHT) 1DMkIV; 70-200mm lens; f/3.5; 1/320sec; ISO 400

WILPENA POUND

» (FAR RIGHT) 5DMkII; 24mm lens; f/8; 1/500sec; ISO 800

PRAIRIE HOTEL

» (BELOW) 1DMkIV; 16-35mm lens; f/10; 1/640sec; ISO 3200



“Planes put in a sharp left turn after take-off and within seconds you have views of the Pound to your right”



Hot rocks

Prehistoric landscape

What makes the Flinders unique is the geological history trapped in the rocks. 540 millions years of folding, faulting and erosion has left behind a series of connected mountain ranges, riverbeds and gullies. Hot spots like Brachina Gorge contain the entire gamut of geological stories within a few hundred metres. Just beyond Parachilna, a fossil record from the Ediacaran period - a pre-Cambrian age named for these very hills - has emerged to reveal some of the oldest life forms known on earth.



Local tip

From Pound to Prairie

An excellent day's drive is on offer when you start at Wilpena and finish at Parachilna. The route takes in the southern sections of the Flinders with a well-maintained track through Bunyerroo Valley. Several lookout stops are easily found on this section of road with high vantage points for photographers. This route connects with Aroona Valley before heading west through Brachina Gorge, where you can meet the resident yellow-footed rock wallabies or just photograph the river gums and dry riverbeds for a few hours. From here it's about 30 minutes or less before you reach the tiny town of Parachilna, where the Prairie Hotel awaits with comfy lodgings and the best food in the Flinders. PrairieHotel.com.au

present a constant danger when driving after dark. The locals repeatedly explain the need to simply slow down if you get caught on the roads in the night: 70km/h is reasonable; 100km/h is suicidal.

I love the wildlife here, and part of the joy of travelling along these roads is that you see so much of it before you even step out of the car. Peregrines swoop to catch prey, wedge-tailed eagles hover above a rocky ridge, and macropodian marsupials like the western red kangaroo graze along the roadside. They always look surprised when a car barrels around the corner, popping their heads up and flicking their ears around to confirm the source of the drama. Most will hop away from trouble and further into the scrub, but every so often a young joey will panic and dash across the road.

Emus present less of a danger to drivers by virtue of being more predictable. Once they decide to run, they just launch themselves forward and are reluctant to change course for anything. They lope along with gangly strides, such awkward seeming creatures that look as though they might tumble over at any second and bang their noses into the dust. They never do.

You'll find the Flinders reasonably compact for driving between photo stops.

The problem is, a short distance can turn into a long day. Inspiration is found at almost every turn, so you stop and get out and think about the shot and before you know it lunch has come and gone. A handful of classic scenes can be found easily enough here, but the experience of shooting and exploring the ranges is always unique for every traveller.

Modest distances are coupled with ample services, and a triangle of accommodation and dining is found between Wilpena, Parachilna and Blinman. Each asserts its own character and each is worth spending a few nights.

Clean air

Wilpena is one of the best places to get in the air around the Flinders Ranges and take some photos. The airstrip is bang on the doorstep of the scenery and if you can fight your way through the kangaroos in the early morning it's a quick turnaround to get airborne for the first flush of light. Low cloud and pea-brained emus are the only things likely to get in the way of a great shot.

Once in flight, the scenic views of Wilpena go from marvellous to magnificent. The sun's first rays hit the dramatic cliffs of Wilpena Pound,

painting the rocks yellow and red. Planes put in a sharp left turn after take-off and within seconds you have views of the Pound to your right. Photographers can enjoy the experience with doors off, offering unimpeded shots across the landscape.

Most scenic flights here use the Cessna 182 or 172 aircraft, which have a high wing, angled struts and fixed landing gear. You can't shoot straight ahead and you have to dodge some of the engineering to the right, but there's lots of room to shoot if you twist around in the seat. When the pilot does a right-hand turn, you're looking directly down to the red earth below and you can feel the tension in the seatbelt.

Doors-off shooting isn't for everyone - but it is a genuine thrill. The tricky part is holding on to your cameras, as the force of wind hitting the lens when you overreach from inside the cabin is intense. You need to clutch your camera with two hands and keep the straps out of harm's way. When you push into the airflow, the buffeting will destabilise your shot, so your window for composition is pretty tight in these smaller planes.

A 24-70mm zoom on a full-frame DSLR is perfect for these shoots, with the ISO dialled up to keep the shutter



» **Emu on the runway**
5DMkII; 70-200mm lens; f/2.8; 1/4000sec; ISO 800



Travel tip

Hitting the road

You don't need a 4WD for most of the Flinders, but a warning when you rent a car to make the trip: most rental agencies have long worked out that travellers visiting here after dark are highly likely to run into a kangaroo, and insurance is denied from dusk 'til dawn when you book a vehicle. You may have more fun and less stress by taking your own car instead of renting something in Adelaide.

Parachilna Gorge
Walking trails abound
throughout the Flinders

“To get decent shots you will need a very long wildlife lens - or a tonne of patience”

Brachina Gorge itself is the classic location for powerful river gums that dig deep into the geology to tap into what water remains. The colours of the rocks contrast with sharp blue skies and green eucalyptus leaves. Enclaves of trees provide inspiration for shooting up close, extracting still life images of decayed leaves, reddish strips of bark or the occasional wildflower hiding among the leaf litter.

Rocks and wallabies

One last treat is hidden in Brachina, the rare and remarkable yellow-footed rock wallabies. These peaceful grazers don't like to wander, preferring to live in colonies where water and feed is naturally abundant. Goats and rabbits place immense pressure on the yellow-footed rock wallabies, and their numbers are modest.

As you drive west through Brachina Gorge, on the way to Parachilna, a special viewing section has been established.

You can sit on a bench and stare at the rocks and not see a thing and yet the wallabies are right in front of you. Their camouflage is effective, and it takes patience to get your eye in. Once you spot them, it's apparent that they are numerous, and rather lazy. Late afternoon is a good time to spot them, as they awaken from rest and start getting active for the night ahead.

To get decent shots you will need a very long wildlife lens - 600mm, ideally - or a tonne of patience. I watched one wallaby cross the road a few metres in front of me, but the majority cling to the sides of rocks and hop away as you approach the fence line. When you see them scaling a cliff face, the beauty of their evolution becomes apparent, able to jump and climb with accuracy while their grey, red and yellow shades of fur help them blend into the background. »



Park info

Treks & trails

Walking trails throughout the Flinders Ranges are under continual improvement and offer some great opportunities for photographers who want to get closer to nature. Campsites across the ranges are perfect for trekking, not just driving, or you can join a tour group and let them organise the trekking while you concentrate on the cameras. Whether walking or driving into the Flinders Ranges National Park, you will need to pay fees to enter or camp. SouthAustralia.com

Yellow-footed rock wallaby
“You can stare and not see a thing,
yet they're right in front of you”



above 1/500th of a second and the aperture around f/10. Early light is ideal as the contrast across the landscape is best and there's no need for any filters. Later in the day the sun gets much brighter and you start to see an effect from a polariser, which just adds another element of complexity to the task of shooting in-air.

Patchy cloud was an issue on my aerial tour but a short window of light broke through in time to rattle off a few frames. Getting the first flight of the day is easier than the last, plus the possibility of heat haze is less of an issue in the mornings. Wilpena Pound is somewhat distinctive in that it offers stunning landscape at either end of the day. You just have to keep an eye out for those emus on landing.

Artists' trail

Landscape photography in the Flinders is typically subtle when compared to other highlights of the Australian outback. Flora in the ranges provides an oasis from the desert beyond, imparting a softness to the scene that draws many artists. Great painters of the ranges have tuned in to this gentle palette, taking care to avoid intense reds, greens or blues. The geology is weathered and aged, an uprising of events that took place millions of years before, so working

in muted tones becomes sympathetic to the surroundings.

Photographers often struggle to be subtle, so the Flinders becomes a challenge from the very start. As you drive north along the western flanks of the ranges, you can see with your eyes how beautiful the landscape is, but your mind does backflips trying to figure out how to capture that in-camera. It's not always obvious how to translate your experience into a capture.

The basic foundations of landscape photography have to be employed with care. Working the foreground, looking for leading lines that carry the eye back into the distance and keeping balance within your composition. The ranges won't yield their best scenes on a platter; you have to earn them. Just getting into position can be something of a journey, with dusty trails across ridgelines providing the easiest access to the classic vistas.

The road between Wilpena and Brachina Gorge passes through Bunyerroo Valley and presents several opportunities to stop and shoot. On a clear morning the light is ideal, illuminating the foreground scrub and distant hills. Further along the drive Aruna Valley is equally worthy of attention.



» IMAGES

PARACHILNA GORGE

» (FAR LEFT, TOP)
5DMkIII; 24mm
lens; 1/200sec;
f/8; ISO 100

YELLOW-FOOTED ROCK WALLABY

» (FAR LEFT, BELOW)
5DMkII; 70-200mm
lens; 1/2000sec;
f/2.8; ISO 400

FLINDERS WESTERN EDGE

» (ABOVE) 5DMkIII;
24mm lens; 1/125sec;
f/8; ISO 100

SUBTLE LANDSCAPES

» (LEFT) 5DMkII;
70-200mm lens;
1/2000sec;
f/2.8; ISO 400

Subtle landscapes
“It's not always obvious
how to translate your
experience into a capture”



“With the doors off the Cessna, we join the eagles a few hundred feet above the landscape”

Through the looking glass

You can't help but have favourites on a photographic journey, and the charms of Glass Gorge in the northern section of the Flinders was mine. A small posted track diverts from Parachilna Gorge and heads up into the hills where sheep, goats and kangaroos graze. It's outside the National Park but carries forward the iconic scenery.

A few lookouts along the way provide highlights for photographers and the drive moves through a wide range of ecosystems before rolling into the backstreets of Blinman, including valleys of native pine and ridges lined with corkwood trees. All this within a short drive of a luxury room at the Prairie Hotel, and a hot breakfast waiting for me when the sunrise shoot has been completed.

In the early mornings there's no traffic on the roads, so every kilometre you startle a new mob of kangaroos or smaller euros. It's a great place to shoot them in the wild, but something more of a challenge than the camping sites

in Wilpena Resort. You'll need more than a 200mm lens to get the best shots – but photography wouldn't be fun if it was too easy anyway.

I revisited some of these scenes in the mornings and afternoon and it never looked the same twice. I also spoke to local photographer Peter MacDonald about this route and he confirmed that he still makes time to seek out new shots between Parachilna and Blinman, exploring the combinations of sky and sunlight on the folding ranges. I admit to being envious of his opportunity, living minutes away from this cauldron of inspiration. But I'm also grateful to have had a chance to see his backyard through the lens, and through his eyes.

Peter offered me one last treat by way of recommendation: a local wool farmer named Ian Fargher, who manages his pastoral land with the help of a light aircraft. Ian's homestead is a short hop from the Blinman airstrip, and even shorter in the Cessna 172.

With the doors off, we join the eagles a few hundred feet above the landscape. Photographers all over Australia have had the pleasure of Ian's flying, sometimes heading down to the southern art of the Flinders, sometimes chasing the salt lakes or just making the most of the immediate scenery between Parachilna and Blinman.

Local tip

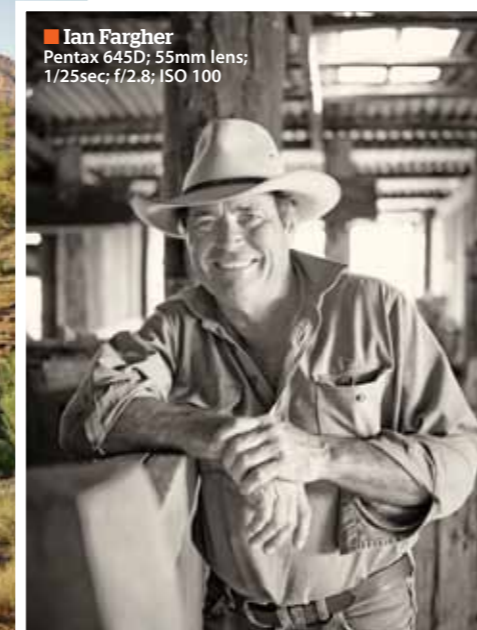
Inside knowledge

Peter MacDonald is a resident of Parachilna who brings an impressive record of editorial experience to his photography. Nobody knows more about the subtle charms and ideal locations for photography in the Flinders than Peter, and he's happy to share his insights. Private workshops can be tailored towards landscape photography in the ranges or stunning rural scenes on nearby cattle stations.

TheSentimentalBloke.com



■ Rugged Ranges
Pentax 645D; 55mm lens;
1/100sec; f/10; ISO 100



■ Ian Fargher
Pentax 645D; 55mm lens;
1/25sec; f/2.8; ISO 100

Air time

Wilpena high and low

Wilpena Pound is a magnificent highlight for photographers, both on the ground and in the air. Wilpena Resort provides an excellent hub for exploring the southern end of the range, with a mix of accommodation options, fuel supplies and food supplies. Treks up to Saint Mary Peak start from here too, or take the fast route and take off for an aerial shoot from the resort airstrip. Planes will do a doors-off option for photographers and the runway is minutes away from the best morning shots Wilpena has to offer.

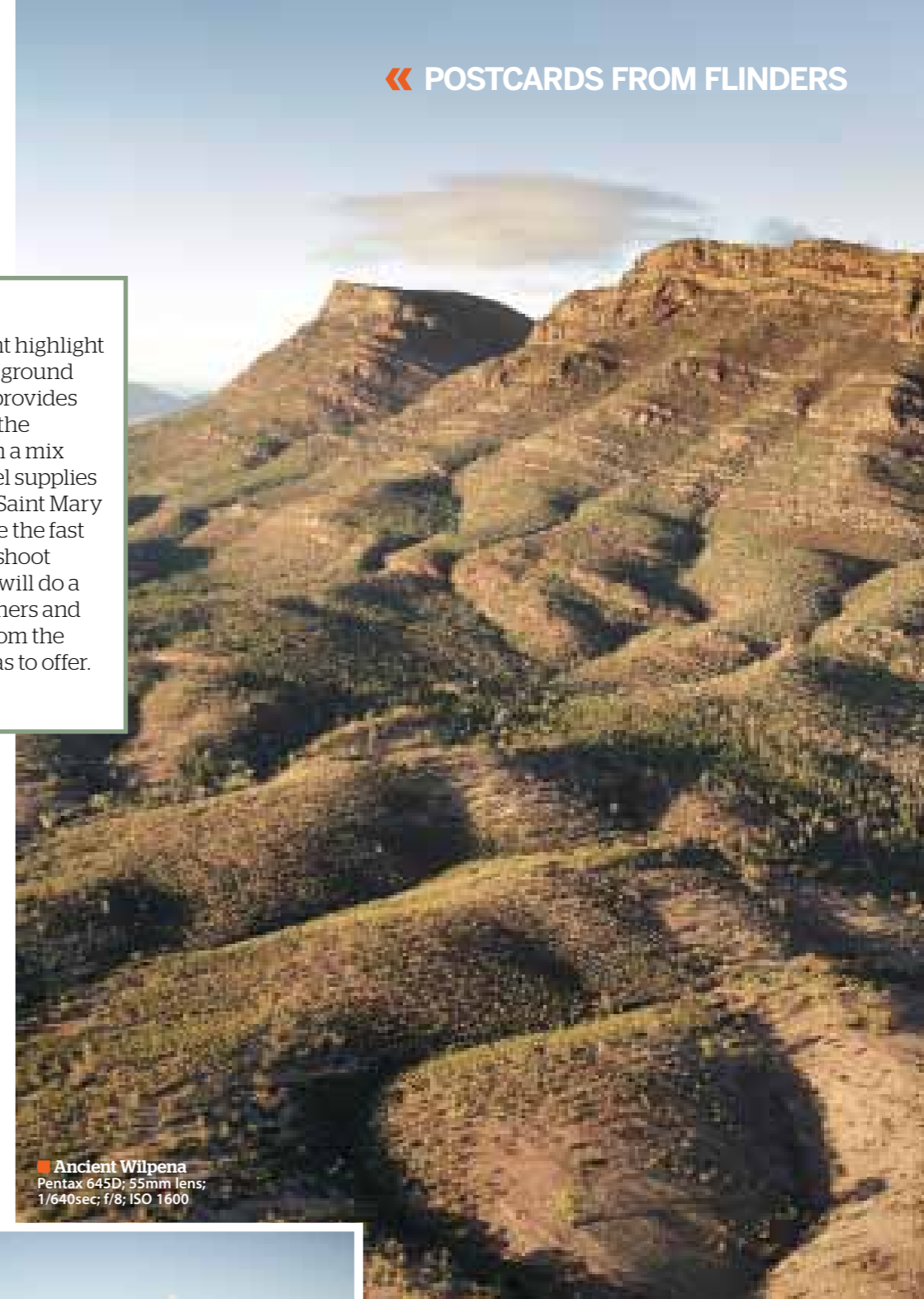
WilpenaPound.com.au

Below our aircraft the geology takes on a new scale. Ridges of quartzite reveal their strata and with a clear horizon you can see the sweeping pattern created by consecutive folds in the ranges. Wilpena is a dramatic exception to its surrounding landscape, but the Parachilna end of the ranges are more naked and exposed. Photographically it's a whole new inspiration, with the mountains to one side and the great Australian outback to the other.

And that's what the Flinders Ranges is all about.

For more of Ewen's adventures here and abroad – including information on guided tours – check out PhotographyForTravellers.com

■ Ancient Wilpena
Pentax 645D; 55mm lens;
1/640sec; f/8; ISO 1600



■ Cessna sessions
5DMkII; 70–200mm lens;
1/1600sec; f/2.8; ISO 100

Tour info

With Peter Elfes

Sydney photographer Peter Elfes is running photography tours in the Flinders Ranges in conjunction with Wilpena Air. The tours will cater for people with all levels of photography experience, with an emphasis on the creative process as well as camera craft, post-processing and printing. Peter has been documenting the changing face of Kati Thanda-Lake Eyre for the past five years. His low-level aerial images represent a unique glimpse into this remote part of Australia. peterelfesphotography.com