

The Fun of Being Forgotten
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Our time in Australia wasn't all spent along Sydney's beaches and surrounding towns. We took quite a few trips, including one near the end of our time down under, into the Australian Outback. Specifically we visited Wilpena Pound: an unusual formation of mountains that formed a gigantic ring approximately 50 square miles in size. On a large scale the range formed something akin to a corral, or what farmers down under call a 'pound'.

While being in the vast and harsh outback was impressive, the best part about Wilpena Pound was the wildlife. There were kangaroos everywhere. They were outside our cabins, on the pathways, and grazing by our tables as we ate. Imagine if the Beverly Commons was home to a herd of deer that wandered over to the cafes to beg for food and slept on the sidewalks outside the library. It was a strange and magical feeling to have giant and untamed animals always around us. In addition to the roos, there were thousands of parrots. The flocks were so large that they filled the sky and their calls made conversation impossible when they flew by.

We took a few hikes while we were there. Of course with our toddler daughter we only stuck to the well graded paths with minimal climbing. The reception desk recommended we take the free shuttle into the Pound where there was just the 'briefest of hikes'. They said that our stroller could handle the path that went into the Pound so that we could view the circular range from within.

We signed up for the shuttle and found that we had the whole bus and ranger to ourselves. Near the mountains and along the various creek beds the red, dusty soil gave way to a forest setting filled mostly with gum trees. As we drove by, we noticed that many of them had incredibly wide trunks that looked as if they'd been burnt out forming caves large enough to stand in.

Our ranger explained that over the course of hundreds of years, the Aborigines who lived in the land, until driven out, would light fires up against the trees. The goal was twofold: first it was a place where their coals could stay hot, and secondly at night it provided a shelter from the gum tree limbs.

"Gum trees limbs?" I asked.

The ranger said, "Oh yes, gum tree limbs fall off the trees for no apparent reason. They weigh tons and kill a few campers each year."

We all tilted our heads at the same time and looked up at the maze of gum tree limbs over us. He then added casually, "We call them the widow-makers."

He dropped us off at the foot of a craggy, rocky hill and pointed to a nice wide trail. "It's just about a 20 minute walk into the Pound."

We thanked him and asked when we should plan to be back for our pick-up. He said he'd be back in two hours.

So we set off. The trail did prove to be fairly doable with the stroller and it took us right through a gap in the mountains and into the Pound. It was a magnificent view only improved by the occasional Roo bouncing by.

We returned to the pick-up point ready for our ranger to show up. Only he didn't. We kept waiting and waiting, but we hadn't packed lunch and our daughter was growing tired. Thirty minutes later we gave up and headed back to the cabins on foot.

Besides the fact that I was incredulous that we'd been forgotten in the outback with a child, it ended up being a fairly pleasant walk - - though we were always mindful of the gum tree limbs hanging ominously above us.

Finally, about a half mile from our cabins, the ranger drove down the road towards us. He stepped out of the van and fumbled with his keys gazing out at the trees and rock formations as if they were family members. "Sorry I'm a little late, but it's so beautiful out here isn't it?"

He clearly loved the place. He obviously would never harm a soul or intentionally cause an ounce of stress, but he might lose himself in his love of staring at rocks and trees and oh, say, forget to pick up a family.

For a moment we all stood there. We listened to the parrots and watched the kangaroos. We were acutely aware that in just a few short weeks we'd be flying home to our hectic, northeastern lives. Then we smiled and assured the ranger that forgetting us was perfectly fine and in fact, we'd come this far so we might as well finish the walk back to our cabins.

He nodded like that had been his plan all along.