



FLINDERS
RANGES
EDIACARA
FOUNDATION

UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR DECEMBER 2025

FOUNDATION NEWS

Our Sixth Birthday Celebration

Many of you joined us to celebrate FREF's six years of achievement at the South Australian Museum in late July. This landmark occasion was also attended by Her Excellency, The Honourable Frances Adamson AC, Governor of South Australia and her husband Mr Rod Bunten, The Hon Susan Close MP and the Hon Kyam Maher, Attorney-General and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The latter is now Deputy Premier and he updated the Legislative Council on this celebration. He concluded his speech by saying the event was a reminder that, while Nilpena may be some hundreds of kilometres away, the story it holds belongs to all South Australians.

What a boost!

Ikara-Flinders Ranges included in Lonely Planet's influential World's Top 25 best places to visit in 2026.

Coming in at number four and described as having "an otherworldly beauty unlike anywhere else in the Australian outback", SA's scenic northern region was the only Australian destination to get a gong. In its *Best of Travel 2026* guide, Lonely Planet says Ikara-Flinders Ranges is often bypassed in favour of the better-known Uluru-Kata Tjuta National park or Western Australia's Kimberley. It notes that Wilpena Pound "begs to be explored..." and notes the significant Ediacaran fossils found in the Nilpena Ediacara National Park.

At FREF and in consultation with our SA government partners we're looking to prepare as best we can for an expected boost in future visitor numbers as the Park approaches summer closure before re-opening in March 2026. There are plenty of projects in train to facilitate enhanced visitor experiences and further opportunities to promote awareness of the scientific importance of discoveries that continue to be made as more of its 550 million year-old fossil fields are carefully excavated.

Commitment to further Ediacaran education continues with the launch of a new website

FREF's marvellous new educational website (see link below) now brings the story of the world's earliest complex life to a global audience. Its creation and development were fully funded through the generosity of Dr Pamela Wall AO, to whom we remain profoundly grateful.

While visitation at the Park reached a record high in 2025, our distinguished researcher Professor Mary Droser champions this new resource for its extended reach: "The website offers a valuable resource for those who can't go to Nilpena and also for those who did visit and are looking for follow-up information."

Resource developer Sandpit Creative Director Sam Haren says the focus is trained on four key Ediacaran organisms and the microbial mats that sustained them. "The site allows everybody who visits it, school students and all interested adults, to explore animated seafloor environments and interactive 3D models. It gives insight into the pioneering palaeontological work at Nilpena Ediacara National Park and is an accessible, visually rich resource that complements visitor experiences while sharing South Australia's (SA) ancient geological heritage with learners of all ages."

Spend some time with the fossils from the comfort of your couch –

<https://ediacarafoundation.org/resource/explore-the-ediacara-biota-in-an-interactive-environment/>

Fossil Rock

We have benefited from generous funding by a private family foundation and individual Friends of FREF to support the production of three more *Fossil Rock* videos for younger people. The star performers will again be the lovely Lucy Rasheed and her friend Kylie Claude of Fastbreak Films will be the producer.

Ediacara Teacher Scholarships

We support this vital project fully and are very pleased to announce that the scholarships will continue to be awarded in 2026. They are facilitated for us by the South Australian Science Teachers Association and given to educators who show strong curriculum links, practical classroom ideas, and a clear willingness to share their learning with others. A huge thank you to the donors who made this worthwhile initiative possible for another year.

Bridgewater Primary School students embrace everything Ediacaran



Bridgewater Primary students have embraced everything about Ediacara after their Year 4 and 5 teacher Danielle Katsivas won a Scholarship to the site this July. Chair Mary Lou Simpson recently paid them a visit.

Royal Society of South Australia presents Verco Medal to Dr Jim Gehling AO

Well-known South Australian Museum Researcher Dr James (Jim) G Gehling AO was recently awarded the Royal Society of South Australia's *Sir Joseph Verco Medal* in recognition of his contributions to science in our state, in particular to furthering the understanding of our exceptional Ediacaran and Cambrian fossil sites and promoting their international importance to researchers and educators.

Jim's work across the Flinders Ranges was essential in establishing the Ediacaran "Golden Spike" in 2004. His fieldwork at Nilpena Station, in conjunction with Dr Mary Droser and their respective teams, led to the establishment of Nilpena Ediacara National Park in 2023. The Park is now regarded as the jewel in the crown of Australia's UNESCO World Heritage Nomination for the Flinders Ranges, which Dr Gehling was also instrumental in developing.

Associate Professor Diego Garcia-Bellido and Dr Mary-Anne Binnie facilitated this prestigious award for Dr Gehling, who retired from the Museum in 2017. Previous luminaries to receive the medal include Sir Douglas Mawson and Reg Sprigg, the geologist credited with discovering the Flinders Ranges Ediacaran fossil trove in 1946.



Associate Professor Diego Garcia-Bellido and Dr Jim Gehling AO

ACTIVITIES AT THE PARK

Regional area school children enjoy the Park

"I want to be an explorer" "Thanks for your dazzling generosity."
Augusta Park Primary, Year 5/6 and several students from Leigh Creek Area School came eagerly to a well-organised Park adventure in September. The Foundation fully funded all transport, accommodation and food costs for this pilot project, made possible by those of our valued donors who regularly support our endeavours to offer such inclusive outreach activities. Very tangible results.

Mary Lou Simpson welcomed the students then it was over to Professor Mary Droser and the three Park Rangers to take the 25 students and their teachers on a three hour immersive tour of the park.

In collaboration with the Department for Education and given continuing donor support, the Foundation plans to offer more students in regional and less advantaged schools the same rewarding experiences.



Chair Mary Lou Simpson welcomes students to the Park (note the signature ripple rock seating)

National Parks and Wildlife Ranger Kym Geue reports on the 2025 Tours

This year saw a significant increase in the number of people visiting and enjoying the experiences we offer at the Park. Overall, we almost doubled our numbers over 2024 with close to 3,000 bookings and with the majority taking the full Fossil Field Exploration tour inclusive of the research sites.

Contributing factors included an increase in tourism numbers to the Flinders Ranges as a whole and the fact many were drawn to see the filling of Lake Eyre (Kati Thunda). However, it's obvious that the word is spreading about Nilpena and the fact that we've developed more regular tours and now offer more flexible booking options is a definite plus. Reviews have been incredible with a 91.7 Net Promoter score this year and a significant reduction in fault-finding comments. This indicates our tours have been well received, with good content, format and infrastructure - and with most visitors indicating that they would highly recommend a Nilpena Ediacara National Park tour to others.



Ranger Kym Geue with students

Park project updates from DEW Board Observer Stuart Paul and Distinguished Professor Mary Droser

Stuart Paul:

Geological timeline from the Blacksmith's Shop to the Woolshed

Work on the geological timeline walk is nearing completion. The pathway now scales to the history of the Earth and has major events signposted. There's a World Heritage plaque along the way, interpretive signposts are all complete, and a new fossil bench will soon be installed. The walk adds significantly to the visitor experience, connecting the Blacksmith's Shop to the Woolshed in a manner which interprets geological time in the context of the Ediacaran Period.

The Foundation is indebted to Kathryn House AM and her husband Nick House for facilitating construction of the new path and the geological timeline. We also thank Diana Rennison for supporting the inclusion of a World Heritage plaque in memory of her late husband.

Shearers' Quarters upgrades

This year, significant work was completed at the Shearers' Quarters, home to research teams headed by Mary Droser and Diego Garcia-Belido, along with other visiting researchers, guests and DEW staff during the year. New floors have been installed in all rooms and (hooray) air conditioning for welcome relief during the extremes of winter and summer. The kitchen has also been upgraded. Replacing ancient, recalcitrant doors and antiquated bathroom facilities are further priorities.

Fossil bed stabilisation

Continued work on fossil bed stabilisation through 2025 saw the MM5 bed finished with improved path access and drainage lines. This nearly completes the main field tour Tennis Courts area of the research site with works on access tracks and drainage to improve this world-class experience and maintain ongoing protection of the beds.

Purchase of the remainder of Nilpena Station

This is now complete, bringing such critical assets as the station homestead, guest houses and workshop into the Park. The creation of staff accommodation, office and workshops is being managed by DEW Project and Asset Services as a major project.

Through a transition agreement with former leaseholders Jane and Ross Fargher, the Department will be progressing upgrade works on these assets during the summer period ahead. Our priority is to ensure that on-park accommodation is available for our Rangers when tours commence in March 2026, and that the workshop is ready for operational use.

Mary Droser:

Transporting Fun Bed from the fossil fields for installation in the Nilpena Woolshed

Work to assess the feasibility of moving this large fossil bed to a new home in the Woolshed is continuing. The Fun Bed contains the largest known Dickinsonia fossil, a number of new fundamental body plans such as Quaestio Simpsonorum and Uncus, the oldest ecdysozoan (the group that includes all insects, crabs, crayfish, nematodes) and many more species.

The Fun Bed will be incorporated into the educational mission of the Foundation and the Park. The two-year endeavour to relocate it for public display is one of the boldest projects yet undertaken by the Foundation. By supporting this million-dollar initiative, donors will be making a huge investment for South Australians in the fields of education, tourism and the economy. Discussions with potential supporters are well on the way.

Fossil bed maintenance

Nearly all the Tennis Courts and South Tennis Courts beds have been stabilized. These constitute the main field tour area. This is a major accomplishment. However, over time, there are needs for maintenance of the beds such as after big rains, the walking trail and the pits themselves. FREF will continue to support these goals to maintain and enhance the world class field tour experience.

WHAT ARE OUR FUTURE PRIORITIES?

The excellent work of research teams clearly on display has influenced many visitors to give their generous support to Foundation projects. All of these are intended to improve Park access and amplify awareness of Nilpena values through interpretation and education.

Over time the Foundation has slowly accumulated very modest yet important surplus funds that enable us to be strategically flexible with our support. We can only continue our work at the Park through donor support. Any amount you can contribute is always greatly appreciated.

Education and learning remain a top priority, as does maintenance of the fossil beds and Nilpena's historic pastoral buildings.

We invite you to make a tax-deductible gift via our website

<https://ediacarafoundation.org/support/#donate>

Please let us know if you would like your donation to be directed toward a specific project.