

The Vanner's

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDA BLOFFWITCH

Experience rich history, world-class wines and a magnificent bicycle trail in South Australia's Clare Valley

VALLEY



South Australia has been blessed with some excellent wine regions and the Clare Valley is definitely up there. But wine is just the first taste of what this magnificent region has to offer.

Coming from Adelaide, you'll be there in less than two hours. You'll get a sense of being out in the country in no time once you pass the town of Gawler. It's here that the landscape changes to picturesque farmland, where vehicle traffic can be few and far between.



Exploring one of the few remaining miners' dugouts at Burra



Taking a breather on the Riesling Trail

“WINE IS JUST THE BEGINNING OF WHAT THIS MAGNIFICENT REGION HAS TO OFFER”

The Clare Valley is full of quaint country towns that are steeped in history. Having visited the region on several occasions previously, we chose to base ourselves at Clare's caravan park for this visit.

Nestled amongst the trees, the park is well spaced out and was surprisingly very green during our summer visit. The school holidays had recently ended so we were able to park comfortably without feeling we were on top of our neighbours.

When travelling to a wine district, under normal circumstances you would expect to be visiting the wineries – but not in Clare. Here, the wineries come to visit you! During the summer months, local wineries are invited to showcase their wines to visitors at the Clare Caravan Park.

On this particular day, Jim Barry Wines (one of the oldest in the region, and a personal favourite of ours) had brought a selection for tasting. Talk

about lucky. We had an absolute blast tasting their magnificent, distinctive range of wines as we shared travel stories with like-minded travellers and enjoyed the sausage sizzle provided by the park. Now that was a unique happy hour (more like happy hours)!

THE RIESLING TRAIL

One reason for our visit to the Clare Valley was the chance to ride along part of the picturesque Riesling Trail. The 35km bicycle trail runs from Auburn in the south to end 7km north of Clare, passing through towns full of old-world charm and alongside some award-winning wineries. The trail follows a former railway line, which was completed nearly 100 years ago and finally dismantled in the late 1980s before eventually becoming a bicycle trail.

You can ride as much or as little

of the trail as you like, since it has numerous entry and exit points. As the trail, often shaded by tall eucalypts, meanders through the valley it is punctuated by storyboards that provide loads of information about the region. If you don't have your own bike, don't despair: bike hire is available in Clare. Or for a unique experience, hire one of the three or four-wheel pedal go-karts, which are well suited for the trail and can be shared by two people.

CLARE VALLEY WINERIES

We really couldn't visit without stopping in at a few of the wineries. You won't find it difficult locating cellar doors between the towns of Auburn and Clare as there are more than 40 of them along this corridor. World-class Riesling and Shiraz are highlights of the valley, with Jesuit priests planting the first grapes back in 1851.



The underground wine cellar at Sevenhill Winery was very welcome on a warm day



We experienced very little road traffic after the school holidays had finished

The beautiful Sevenhill Winery and its gardens were very welcoming



VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRES

CLARE VALLEY VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

33 Old North Road, Clare, SA
Ph: (08) 8842 3817
W: www.clarevalley.com.au

BURRA VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

2 Market Square, Burra, SA
Ph: (08) 8892 2154
W: www.visitburra.com

FREEDOM
CAMPING



SA 227: BURRA SHOWGROUNDS

Ph: (08) 8892 2738



SA 287: FARREL FLAT OVAL

Self-contained vehicles only



SA 289: CLARE VALLEY
RACECOURSE

Ph: (08) 8842 1033



SA 291: YACKAMORUNDIE PARK

Ph: (08) 8846 4077



A kid at heart – Grant couldn't resist the opportunity to sit behind the wheel of this special truck



The winery at Sevenhill is one of the oldest in the district, and when visiting you are treated to a unique heritage experience. On the site you will find not only an underground wine cellar, but also a wine museum and St Aloysius Church. Beautiful gardens surround the cellar door, so we chose to rest our weary bike legs here and enjoy a cheese platter and a glass of their award-winning Riesling before continuing.

EATING OUT

Some cellar doors have accompanying restaurants and the food can only be

described as sensational. Whether you're after a tasty platter, tapas, or gourmet-style restaurant meals, you won't go hungry in the valley. Make your choice from a wide range of eateries at town hotels, restaurants and bistros.

We were also tempted by the cafes and bakeries found in both Clare and Sevenhill with the Little Red Grape Bakery being a gem. Its sweet and savoury selection was enormous so we ended up visiting on numerous occasions. I'm not really sure we ever did enough bike riding to work off all the calories we consumed!



“THE SEVENHILL TWILIGHT MARKET IS POPULAR
WITH BOTH LOCALS AND VISITORS”

We love attending country markets and several are held within the region each month. During summer, the Sevenhill twilight market is popular with both locals and visitors. On the night we visited, it was very busy. Stallholders were numerous with local produce, food stalls (excellent spring rolls), and entertainment all included. We managed to pick up a good selection of jams, artisan bread and some enormous free-range eggs, which were a perfect addition to our cooked breakfast the following morning.

ATTRACTIONS
GALORE

We struck a balance between bike riding and strolling through a few of the towns in the valley. A walk through the main streets revealed a number of old buildings built during the 19th century, all still in remarkably good condition.

We were particularly drawn to an early settler's cottage at Penwortham belonging to pastoralist and explorer, John Horrocks. Built in 1839, the cottage is one of the oldest stone buildings in South Australia and today is used as a museum.

Not far from Penwortham is the quaint village town of Mintaro, home of the very impressive Martindale Hall. This Georgian-style manor dates back to 1879 and dominates the landscape as you approach the homestead grounds.

THINGS TO DO

- Riesling Trail
- Visit Some Wineries
- Burra Heritage Passport
- Martindale Hall
- Mintaro Maze



Martindale Hall at Mintaro is a remarkable Georgian-style manor

Riding the Riesling Trail enabled us to see attractions that we may have missed when driving



For the young at heart, Mintaro Maze is located only a few minutes away from Martindale Hall. Find your way through the living maze, spot some hidden treasures in the garden along the way, and then relax with some refreshment from their gift shop.

To really appreciate the views of the Clare Valley, we headed up to Quarry Hill and Neagles Rock lookouts located in Clare. Although both lookouts were very windy when we visited, they provided excellent views to the valley below.

BURRA DAY TRIP

Burra is only 30 minutes away from Clare, and is an excellent day trip.

When copper was discovered in 1845, a mine was established which employed nearly 1000 men. Koorunga (which later became Burra) rapidly grew as a result of what was called the "Monster Mine", to become Australia's largest inland town by 1851.

Whilst mining ceased years ago, the town today has a magnificent heritage trail. To take advantage of everything to see and do around the district, we purchased a Burra Heritage Passport from the local visitor centre. The passport system, comprising a guidebook and key that provides access to no less than eleven historic sites, is a fantastic way to see the town and its surrounds.

WHERE TO STAY

CLARE CARAVAN PARK

136 Main North Road, Clare, SA

Ph: (08) 8842 2724

W: discoveryholidayparks.com.au/clare

BURRA CARAVAN PARK

12 Bridge Terrace, Burra, SA

Ph: (08) 8892 2442

LEASINGHAM VILLAGE CABINS

Lot 94 Main North Road,

Leasingham, SA

Ph: (08) 8843 0136

W: www.leasinghamcabins.com.au

AUBURN CARAVAN PARK

Ford Street, Auburn, SA

Ph: 0417 550 781

There is plenty of shade available at Clare's caravan park



Happy hour with a difference – the wineries coming to the caravan park!

HOW TO GET THERE

The Clare Valley is a very easy 100km drive from Adelaide along Port Wakefield Road before turning onto the Northern Expressway and then finally onto the Horrocks Highway just past Gawler.

With map and key in hand, we found the trail to be excellent, as we could visit the local attractions at our own pace and in the comfort of our own vehicle. A variety of historic sites are covered along the

trail including Reduth Gaol, Burra Smelter, Unicorn Brewery Cellars and multiple museums. It's a full day affair, plus some!

One attraction on the historic trail was a visit to the miners' dugouts. With the rapid development of the town in 1851, there was a significant shortage of housing for the miners and their families. It's hard to imagine that nearly 2000 people lived in dugouts along the town's creek, living in unsanitary conditions for nearly 10 years. Today there are only a few of the fragile dugouts remaining.

If you're looking for somewhere different for your next trip – somewhere that offers towns steeped with history, magnificent wineries, and loads of attractions – the Clare Valley is waiting for you. ■

"IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE THAT NEARLY 2000 PEOPLE ONCE LIVED IN DUGOUTS ALONG THE TOWN'S CREEK"

The beautiful old railway station building at Burra is now one of the town's museums

