



Feeding wallabies at Adelaide Hills winery, Sinclair's Gully, which has won awards for its eco experiences

Blended visions

There are wines, wallabies and gongs in the Adelaide Hills, says BRAD CROUCH

IT was the koala that helped answer the question. It climbed down from branches above us as we warmed ourselves on a deck around a brazier fire in the late afternoon, looked us over when it reached the ground then climbed a neighbouring tree in search of even juicier gum leaves.

With a backwards glance it seemed to ask: "Does my bum look big in this?" as its furry backside ascended. But the question it helped answer was the one I came to investigate: How does a small family business hidden in the bush near Norton Summit win some of South Australia's top tourism awards?

Sinclair's Gully scooped two 2008 South Australian Tourism Awards, for Ecotourism and the Qantas Award for Excellence in Sustainable Tourism. It also snagged the Tourism Winery Award at the 2008 SA Great Adelaide Hills Regional Awards.

Its wines are fine but owners

Sean and Sue Delaney operate a tourism experience more than just a winery.

The couple bought the secluded 10ha property in 1997 when much of it was overrun with weeds. Careful nurturing has restored it to its native glory and today it is one of only two Australian wineries accredited as an advanced eco-certified cellar door.

The wine-meets-wilderness property has the last large candle-back woodland in the Mt Lofty Ranges. The creamy bark of these magnificent gums glows like a candle when lit by sunset or a full moon. And they are notorious for dropping limbs that create hollows loved by the rare yellow-

tailed black cockatoos, among 66 bird and 150 native plant species on the property.

Its green credentials are noble – with conservation and recycling – but to be a tourism drawcard it takes more than green zeal. In Sinclair Gully's case it is the people as well as the place.

Bushwalkers are welcomed on guided tours (with lunch platters and wine afterwards). On such a walk through bushland Sean chatted about bushcare and creek systems, stopping at various plants, such as a nondescript reedy plant he said was the native snottygobble, which strangles exotic broom and gorse.

"Sheep love to eat it but is very

important if you want to revegetate," he said. Sean also showed a fox bait site that had accounted for a staggering 1915 foxes since the Delaneys arrived. Back near the cellar door, a fox-proof enclosure is home to a healthy mob of tamar wallabies and bettongs.

In May and September "wine and wallaby" Friday evenings, with a campfire in the enclosure, allow guests to enjoy the wildlife and warmth. There are outdoor twilight tastings from November to March, and "winter warmers" in June-August where visitors can taste wine around a brazier, nibble on a cheese platter and soak up the serenity.

Numbers are limited – for the Delaneys, the key is the personal touch. "We like to make friends – you can't do that with big numbers," Sean said.

Sharing a few laughs with Sean, as a koala wandered past on a property that values native residents as much as guests, answered lots of questions.

Details: Sinclair's Gully is on Colonial Drive, Norton Summit, ph 8390 1995 or visit www.sinclairsgully.com

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Details: www.jacobs creek.com



A rare cockatoo at Sinclair's Gully