



Western KI Caravan Park owners Fiona and Mark Jago six months after the fire on June 4, 2020 with one of the donated trees planted in the park.

Picture: STAN GORTON



Mark and Fiona Jago saying farewell to the Western KI Caravan Park & Wildlife Reserve on July 19, 2023 after eight years of owning the park.

Picture: SUPPLIED

Fires then COVID

STAN GORTON

AFTER eight amazing years filled with triumph and tragedy, Fiona and Mark Jago have said farewell to their caravan park on the western end of Kangaroo Island.

The couple have sold the park and are moving back to Sale, Victoria to be closer to family.

"So it's been nearly eight years and with a few ups and downs, it's time for a new chapter in life...and a holiday! KI you have been amazing," Fiona posted on social media the day they drove off, the caravan hitched to the Landcruiser.

It was three years after they arrived that the fire of January 3, 2020 ripped through the park, destroying much of the infrastructure, leaving only a few cabins remaining.

Then COVID's travel bans hit almost immediately, meaning the Jagos had more than a year to focus on rebuilding before visitors arrived back.

Working with others to secure grant funding, they were able to build an extensive workers accommodation complex, including a

bunkhouse kitchen, as well as a new office and fuel station.

On the night of the fire, they like most western KI residents retreated to Kingscote and the eastern end of the Island, returning in the days after to find what remained.

Immediately after the fires, the Jagos lived in their caravan for a couple of months and when power returned they moved into one of the surviving small cabins.

Later they moved into one of the larger, new cabins, but it was never really home.

Since moving to the Island, there's been three marriages and the birth of five grandchildren back home in Gippsland.

"When we left Victoria, we didn't have any grandchildren," Fiona said.

The families will miss holidays and all the wildlife and scenery on western KI, but are "extremely excited" to have them back in Victoria.

The former dairy farmers have now bought a 112-year-old heritage home in central Sale and plan on renovating it to keep them busy.

Fiona posted the following on her social media on their departure from KI:

"Our time on the Island and at the park has come with many highs and many lows. Our lowest point being that of the 2020 bushfires.

"This natural disaster, followed by a second that same year in the COVID 19 pandemic, took its toll on not only us but so many others on the island.

"It was a time we wish we could forget but unfortunately, we cannot. A time that we will never forget however, and this is quite possibly the highlight for us, is the uniting force of the Kangaroo Island community and how so many supported us during this time and with our rebuild.

"Not only has the community on Kangaroo Island supported us, but many others far and wide. It is not lost on us that the support and donations that our friends both here, back in Gippsland and across the world were very much essential and needed.

"When losing everything except a few cabins, it was your support and kindness that ensured we were able to rebuild and continue

with this amazing caravan park.

"There are far too many people to thank individually at this time, so we thank you all for your support.

"We will miss our amazing staff who have assisted us immensely with the fire recovery and general day-to-day duties that we ask of them.

"We will miss the many tourists both national and international, as well as the walking groups that we assist in achieving the five-day walking trail.

"But mostly, what we will miss is the wildlife that graces our doorstep every single day. There are few places on earth where you can wake up to a kangaroo at your front door or a koala up the tree just outside the window or even, a sneaky possum scavenging in the rubbish bin.

"We wish Discovery Holiday Parks the absolute best in taking this amazing caravan to even bigger and better places in the future. We look forward to seeing what you have in store."

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Say G'Day to Western Park's new owners

■ STAN GORTON

G'DAY Group has acquired the Western Kangaroo Island Caravan Park & Wildlife Reserve, adding it to its list of 87 holiday parks.

It has plans to invest an initial \$1 million into the property to be renamed "Discovery Parks - Kangaroo Island" and will also work on a master plan for long-term future development.

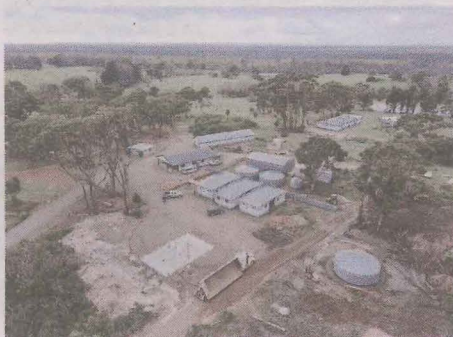
Located at the entry to the acclaimed Flinders Chase National Park, G'day Group says the Western KI caravan park provided "significant strategic opportunities as the only accommodation of its type in the Island's west and is the largest holiday park on KI".

Previous owners Mark and Fiona Jago purchased the park eight years ago, overseeing a significant rebuild and expansion after the 2020 bushfire disaster.

They are headed back to Sale, Victoria to be closer to family.

See more about Mark and Fiona in a separate Islander article.

The Western KI caravan park joins G'day Group's network of more than 87 owned and operated holiday parks around Australia.



Major works and additions to the Western Kangaroo Island caravan park since the January 3, 2020 bushfire have included a new office, fuel station and workers' accommodation, as photographed in August 2022.

Picture: STAN GORTON

The 17-hectare property features 71 tourist sites, 13 cabins and a 48-person bunkhouse, as well as a fuel station.

G'day Group chief investment officer Amanda Baldwin said the acquisition was a key strategic addition to the company's national footprint and offered significant development upside.

"Kangaroo Island is one of Australia's most loved tourism destinations and a location we

have been eyeing for some time as a valuable addition to our portfolio," Ms Baldwin said.

"There's a significant amount of tourism development planned for the Island, including the new Flinders Chase Visitor Centre and The Cliffs golf course.

"With access better than ever thanks to the new SeaLink ferry contract and more direct Qantas flight coming this summer, we're expecting continued growth in visitation to the Island.

"This acquisition offers us a significant strategic advantage to capitalise on this growth as the only accommodation of its type in Western Kangaroo Island."

G'day Group will invest an initial \$1 million into the property before commencing a master planning process to determine future development options. The park already underwent a major renovation and expansion in 2022, featuring a new reception, deluxe cabins, bunkhouse, camp kitchens and fuel bay.

"We're eager to explore the Park's development potential to further broaden its appeal as a high quality affordable accommodation option, while ensuring we maintain the connection to nature that makes Kangaroo Island such a sought-after tourist destination," Amanda said.

"This will enable us to attract more visitors to the Island and increase length of stay, which will in turn deliver great benefits for other local tourism operators and the wider community."

Founded by Grant Wilckens in 2004 with three caravan parks in WA, G'day Group calls itself "Australia's leader in regional accommodation experiences" with more than 300 properties across the country.

G'day Group is home to Discovery, a network of more than 87 owned and operated holiday parks and resorts, with properties in iconic regional destinations, including Kings Canyon, Rottne Island and the world famous El Questro.

The company also owns G'day Parks, a network of 220-plus independently owned licensed parks and more than 200,000 G'day Rewards members, and Australia's number one regional travel community, Wikicamps.

G'day Group reached \$1 billion status in 2020 and has ambitions to double in size in the next five years.

The company is majority owned by Australian Retirement Trust and founder and chief executive officer Grant Wilckens is the chairman of the Caravan Industry Association of Australia and a board director of the South Australian Tourism Commission.