

Tourism? We are missing out big time



Moyjil/Point Richie is one of three rich cultural and environmental sites in the south-west that could be maximised to form a major tourist attraction at the end of the Great Ocean Road.

The Terrier

A little statistic popped out of Parks Victoria about six weeks ago that should have had us all gasping and wondering what we are doing wrong in Warrnambool.

[Here it is:](#)

“A record daily peak of 11,000 national and international visitors made the trip to the Twelve Apostles during Chinese New Year celebrations”.

Please read that again, because it took me at least three reads to believe what I was reading: a record **daily** peak of

11,000 national and international visitors visited the Twelve Apostles during Chinese New Year (between January 28 and February 15) this year.

This was a 30% increase on last year. Thirty per cent!

And this is all happening less than an hour from Warrnambool – 72.7km down the road – yet we are seeing so little of the action here.

Why??

This is not a new question.

Over the years there has been much head-scratching, hours of discussion and piles of reports on how to encourage this lucrative market of cashed-up, eager travellers to travel just one more hour down the road to Warrnambool where, we would hope, they stay for more than 24 hours rather than passing through on their way to somewhere else, or turning around and travelling back to Melbourne.

To me, the answer starts here: give them something irresistible, something that they haven't already seen or heard during their trek down the most popular coastal road in Australia.

And what might that be?

To me, the answer starts here: our incredible indigenous story.

I don't know about you, but whenever I travel overseas, I can't wait to immerse myself in the indigenous history, to read about it, see it and experience it through a tour, a trek, a talk, a meal or a spontaneous, random encounter.

Here in the south-west, and right here in Warrnambool, we are sitting on some of the richest indigenous stories in Australia, creating a natural 'trail' from **Moyjil/Point**

Richie, to **Tower Hill** and out to **Budj Bim** (Mt Eccles/Lake Condah) near Heywood.

Budj Bim is on the cusp of a UNESCO World Heritage listing partly because of its stone eel traps that are 1500 years older than the Pyramids or Stonehenge.

And Moyjil, apart from being a geological wonder, has been [a site of human occupation for at least 35,000 years](#) and, pending the results of ongoing tests, could also be the oldest site of human habitation *anywhere on the planet*, dating back 80,000 years.

Why are we not celebrating and promoting this far and wide?



December 2016: The western walkway from Moyjil down to the beach.

Tower Hill, meanwhile, is where Great Ocean Roaders can see a koala, emu or a kangaroo while also learning about indigenous culture, but its full potential as a tourist attraction is far

from realised, starting with the poorly signposted, pot-holed and dangerous entrance that must be the worst of any tourism attraction in Victoria.

To be fair, progress is being made at each of these sites to promote its significance (especially Budj Bim) and plans have been drawn up to manage their futures, but I cannot find any coordinated effort to promote the three locations as a **not-to-be-missed tourism experience** that would, in turn, create jobs and boost our local economy.

There is no single, one-stop-shop to find out about what should be a cultural and environmental gem of a self-guided tour: there is no one map, brochure, website, or app.

Try it yourself: visit the [Visit Warrnambool website](#), click on “what to see and do” and see [what you find](#).

The top listings alternate, but when I clicked, the first item was mini golf.

But back to Moyjil for a moment.

A 24-page [conservation and management plan for this area](#) was published in 2013, setting out how it should be cared for by the State Government (which owns it) and Warrnambool City Council (which manages it) but, four years on, there are worrying signs about the financial commitment needed to look after this precious piece of coast.

The western walkway from the carpark fell apart in early December last year, just before the start of the peak tourism season, and access to the beach was blocked.

It is now late April and the walkway is still busted although now, of course, there has been five months’ of people making their own path down the side of the walkway, as we do, and the erosion is obvious.

When it will be fixed, nobody knows.



April 2017: The western walkway from Moyjil down to the beach.

I contacted the state Environment Minister Lily D'Ambrosio and her spokesman said the council had applied last year for a slice of \$730,000 in funding to fix the walkway as one of several work projects it had planned for the site.

It was not successful. (The \$730,000 fund received applications totalling more than \$3.1 million).

"DELWP is willing to look at how it can support Warrnambool City Council in fixing this walkway, and will discuss with Council how the department can assist," he wrote.

I asked the council for its take on the situation and its spokesman said: "We will continue to seek funding from the

State Government for maintenance. It will also be part of Council's upcoming budget deliberations."

And that was it. No passion. No prioritising. No real sense of urgency.

I can only wonder when a wooden walkway – a walkway – can't be fixed (Triton woodworkers + youth unemployment project?), what the long-term future really holds for this magnificent site.

And in the meantime, the vast majority of the tens of thousands of tourists who are travelling to the Twelve Apostles each summer just turn around – or keep driving...

Can the Maremmas save Flagstaff Hill?

Comment: Can the Maremma's save W'bool's Flagstaff Hill?

Letters: Walk in memory of a working class man

Walk in the memory of a working-class man.

Finding harmony on the hill



It has been an 11-year journey, but Mick and Amanda Fennessy are living their dream on their Tower Hill property that they have partly converted into self-hosted accommodation.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] H [/dropcap]ow do two former police officers from Melbourne wind up running holiday accommodation near an ancient volcano in South-West Victoria? The same way as so many other seachangers who move to the area – via a holiday to Port Fairy.

It is 11 years since **Mick** and **Amanda Fennessy** made the decision to relocate from inner-suburban Richmond to a five-acre property at Tower Hill after visiting relatives in Port Fairy and – you guessed it – seeing a property for sale on their way home.

“We did a bit of a drive-by, had a look, and dismissed it, but then shortly after we returned home, we opened *The Age* newspaper and there it was, rural property of the week. It was

like it was telling us something,” says Mick.

The timing was right, Mick explains, for the couple to try something different with their lives, having worked for many years in the police force (which is where they met) and financial investigative work. They bought what he affectionately describes as “five-and-a-half nuisance acres”: too small to generate an income, but too large not to require significant maintenance and mowing.



Drinks anyone? Quirky, locally made garden art like this piece by Casterton artist Barbara Dobson is sprinkled around the Fennessy property.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] P [/dropcap]art of the property is taken up by rolling lawns and native gardens, while another portion is devoted to a couple of hundred fruit trees, including a splendid fig, that provide ample produce for Amanda’s home-made preserves that she sells through local markets under the Tower Hill Farm Produce label.

That left about two acres overlooking Lakeview Road, with

southern views to the ocean and eastern views across to the night lights of Warrnambool.

“Right from the get-go we thought about how we could use the two acres for accommodation, but we weren’t entirely sure exactly which path to take,” Mick says.

The pair knew they wanted something unusual, so initially explored using up-styled shipping containers – “self-contained, containers” – before settling on recycled school classrooms.

The six school portables come from mostly tiny hamlets – Coolaroo South, Nilmah, Merrijig, Bendigo South East, Syndal South, Manchester, Newtown and Goornong – and were bought through a supplier who trades in such things.

“They are quite incredible structures with solid hardwood floors and everything hand-nailed. Even though they are called portables, they aren’t going anywhere,” Mick says with a laugh.



The interiors of the former school classrooms have been completely refurbished to give them a second life as accommodation. Image: Harmony at Tower

Hill.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] A [/dropcap]manda, who during this interview is busy cooking figs on the stove, overseeing wood chopping by two visiting friends, and checking on the progress of a builder, dips in and out of the conversation, but has a moment to show off one of the five portables that have so far been converted.

As Amanda hauls back the sliding door (remember those?), I feel for a split second as if I am about to revisit Grade Two with Miss Fitzgerald at Warrnambool East Primary School circa 1972, but these portables are *nothing* like a classroom. The transformation from a utilitarian space into sleek, modern accommodation is remarkable.

"We always had a mental picture in our head of what it would look like, and we have not only reached that, but I think we have exceeded it," Mick says.

Harmony at Tower Hill, as it is known, has been open since last December and, because of its dog-friendly status, recently accommodated some of the Maremma dogs (and their handlers!) during the filming of the *Oddball* movie in Warrnambool.



Another life: Former Detective Sergeant Mick Fennessy and Senior Constable Amanda Fennessy during their days in the force.

[dropcap style="color: #a5cecd;"] T he Fennessy's complete change in lifestyle has coincided with Mick having the ultimate wake-up call that life can, quite literally, shift in a heart beat.

When we meet, he is three weeks into his recovery from a quadruple bypass on a damaged heart that, if left untreated, would have failed him.

"It was like the warning light coming on, on your dashboard and you know that the rollercoaster is taking a dip downhill. You don't want to see that too many times in your life before you start making changes," he says.

Fortunately the only lights coming on for Mick now are those twinkling in the distance from Warrnambool.



Did you hear the one about...? Garden art by Timboon sculptor [Jon Hayes](#) (Tomrtoe) is among the Fennessy's collection.

[box type="bio"] You can find out more about Harmony at Tower Hill on the web [here](#). [/box]

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