

River camping is a shoe-in



To find the Fitzroy River turnoff, look for the shoes...

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] T
[/dropcap]HE MOUTH of the **Fitzroy River**, between Tyrendarra and Portland, is a wonderful spot that is hard to find, so it is best to look for the shoes.

Some kind and obviously quirky people who live in the farmhouse right across from the turnoff to the river on the Princes Highway have very helpfully decorated their front fence with what looks like every pair of shoes they have ever worn.

Or maybe they found them on the roadside.

Either way, the shoes provide a handy visual marker for the gateway to what is a lovely, yet wild, camping spot for those who like to rough it a little...and bring their dogs.

The “shoe turnoff” is in fact Thompsons Rd which winds its way

for a short distance to the coast and the river mouth.

The roughly 4km trip takes you through some lovely farmland dotted with abandoned buildings built by the early settlers in the area.



Remnants of life from another time can be found on the drive to the river mouth.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] T
[/dropcap]he first stop at the [Fitzroy River campground](#) area is the boat ramp where you can wander out on the wooden jetty and watch the river surging its way to the sea.

Drive a little further on to find the start of the campground area, which is essentially a patch of open grass with several trees for shelter.

This area is quite protected from the southerly winds that can whip through the south-coast with ferocity (there are wind farms in this area for a reason!).

Another 200m along and you come to the riverbank where camping

is also permitted, but there is less protection from the elements.

Part of the appeal of Fitzroy River is that it remains bush camping, with no power or facilities beyond a new, long-drop toilet block, and a basic picnic and barbecue area.

Camping is free, except for peak times, when an onsite caretaker will collect a small fee; so don't expect a Big 4 – or the crowds that come with it.

Instead, in the off-season particularly, you will most likely have the place to yourself.



Barney, the Bluestone cocker spaniel, does the water test in the estuary.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] I [/dropcap]t is a wonderful area to explore, with a short walk along the estuary taking you right down to the foreshore of the wild ocean.

Information signs indicate that at least two tall ships came

to grief in the area in the 1800s, including the *Julia*, the remains of which are apparently still visible as a dark patch in the surf, visible from the hilltop.

Dogs are welcome, but plovers nest in the area (it is a great spot for bird watching) so remember to bring a leash...



Basic facilities at Fitzroy River mean peace and quiet, particularly, in the off season.



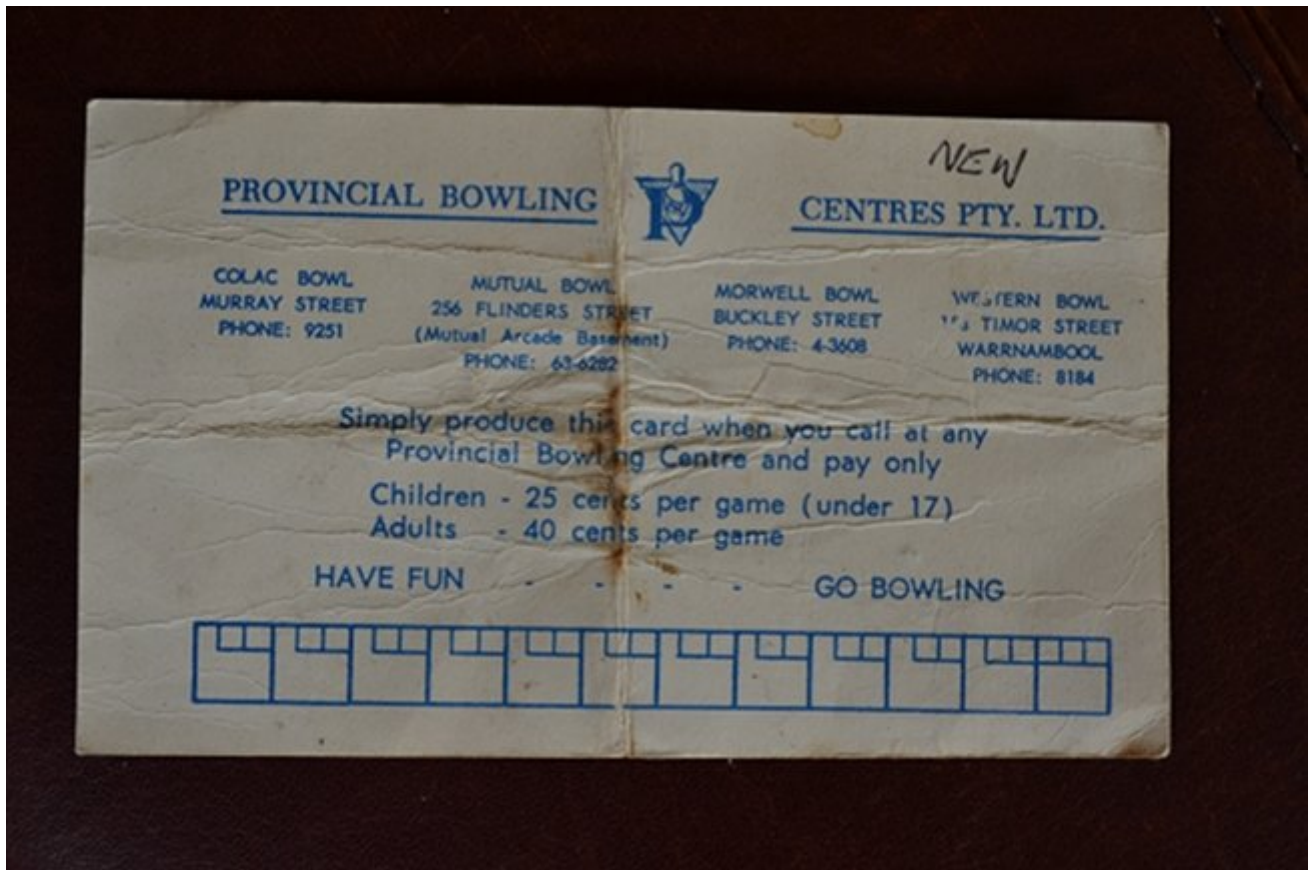
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Bowlin', bowlin', bowlin'...



THE OPENING of the Warrnambool tenpin bowling alley on Christmas Eve, 1963, was cause for great excitement, with the local newspaper declaring that the city was now home to a sport that “has captured the world”.

At that time, the complex was known as the Western Bowl and patrons paid 40 cents a game for adults, or 25 cents for children (under 17 – 17!), to try their hand at knocking down a series of pins with a heavy ball while wearing stylish, soft-souled shoes.

The place was a hit and no doubt early marketing ideas like this one – a patron card sent to potential customers at Christmas time – helped with its success.

Fifty years on, “The Bowl”, as it is affectionately known, is still going strong and has a vibrant league competition that has produced its share of champions.

My mother kept everything – and I mean, everything. Each week we will reveal another item from the collection.

Success is purely organic



Nick Kelson sells organic produce fresh from his uncle's farm at Dennington.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] W
[/dropcap]hen it comes to clocking up food miles, the 4.9km from Dennington to the Warrnambool Showgrounds is about as short as it gets.

This is how far the fresh produce travels each week from the Kelson family farm to a Sunday stall at the showgrounds, where **Nick Kelson** sells under the name **Merri Banks Organic Produce**.

Nick is the nephew of **Frank Kelson**, who has 16 acres at the back of the Dennington Oval, including 10 acres under production. The farm has been in the family since 1880 and produces potatoes, pumpkin, sweetcorn and garlic on a large scale for the Melbourne fresh food markets.

Fifteen years ago, Frank turned to organic production, making him one of the first in the region to do so.

“My grandfather was horrified,” Nick said, laughing.

“He would say, ‘this house was built on super phosphate!’”

As Nick explains, however, his uncle could see the damage that chemicals were doing to the environment and realised that organic production was not only better for the long-term preservation of the farm, but that the produce tasted more like it should.



A pile of pumpkins was among the seasonal produce on

sale last week.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] While the bulk of what Merri Banks produces is sold wholesale, locals are fortunate to have Nick selling a select range each week at the Sunday markets.

It is the only place where people can buy the produce direct.

The stall is the size of a couple of kitchen tables and Nick unloads his stock from the back seat and boot of a car, not a semi-trailer.

Some weeks he will have boxes of fresh dug potatoes in a number of varieties, together with pumpkins, carrots and garlic. Other weeks there will be boxes of heritage tomatoes, sweetcorn and beetroot, alongside bouquets of kale, spinach and silverbeet.

It all depends what it is season.



Going, going, gone. Things move fast on market day.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] A
[/dropcap]dvertising is by word of mouth – and a trusty A-frame – with Merri Banks nowhere to be found on Facebook, Twitter or even as a website.

It is an old-fashioned, but winning approach, and Nick finds most of his stock is gone by mid-morning.

“We have been here four years now. It took a while to build up, but we are doing well,” Nick said.

Just as he spoke, a man approached to buy a purply bulb of organic garlic. Nick dropped it onto the scale.

“That’ll be \$1.50,” he said.

“Oh! I didn’t realise it would be so cheap. I take another two

thanks," the customer replied.

"No problem," said Nick, as he placed the bulbs into a brown paper bag and gave it a swing.



Organic garlic: not from China, Argentina or Chile...but Dennington.

[box type="bio"] Merri Banks Organic Produce. Sunday Undercover Markets, Warrnambool Showgrounds. [/box]

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Always check the auto-correct!

Each week we post a gem from Gumtree – the online buy, sell, swap site – that is odd, unusual or just plain different. Most items are/were for sale in South-West Victoria or not far beyond.

This week, a lesson in why it is always worth checking the auto correct spelling on your Gumtree app.

What should have read: “Deep Fryer. In box. Hardly used. \$15.”

Instead said this:

[box] Deep Tryer in Bedroom. Hardly Used. \$15.[/box]



Deakin's pay-to-park farce



A sold-out footy match? No, it is the free parking around the oval at Deakin, Warrnambool, where students would rather park and walk to avoid a \$6 a day fee. It is only open in dry weather.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] R
[/dropcap]egional universities are vital to the small communities they serve, in terms of providing quality education, but especially for the continued economic development of those regions.

They educate *local* people, mostly young people (and in so doing help keep them in the towns they know) and provide many jobs.

Students have to work hard (there is a huge drop off rate in the first year) and most try to balance study with part-time

paid work, often difficult to secure in regional areas. Indeed, trying to encourage young people to stay and study in Warrnambool was a key topic in the recent election for Wannon.

Most students struggle financially during this time, so it seems unbelievable that a regional university would choose to make going to university any harder.

Deakin University's Warrnambool campus, despite being on the outskirts of town, charges students the same fee to park their cars (\$6 a day or by the hour rates) as students at its Melbourne and Geelong-based campuses. To make matters worse, it provides a solitary ticket machine at the Warrnambool campus which leads to long snaking queues of cars (backing up to the railway station 500m away) at peak times.

[box] There is little argument in city campuses charging for parking, as there is limited space and the public transport system is usually close at hand: there are viable and cheap options for students who do not want to pay.[/box]



Could this be South-West Victoria's hardest working parking ticket machine?

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] T
[/dropcap]he Warrnambool campus offers free parking of a sort (when it is not raining)! It allows students and staff to park for free around the edge of its football field. It is currently closed because of wet grounds, causing another spike of complaints and a return to long lineups for the single ticket machine.

You might ask, why don't students just use the train service? After all, it is cheaper and better for the environment.

The \$1.15m train station, built in 2006, is only useful if you want to turn up to the campus at 5.35am or 5.20pm (from west to east). Practically useless. A bus service is scheduled to arrive at the campus from its W'bool rounds at 8.45am, but our contacts say it is often late and therefore students are reluctant to take the risk.

[box] It's important to know that not all regional universities charge their students for the 'privilege' of parking a car to attend lectures or study.[/box]

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #8F9F59;"] M
[/dropcap]onash University in Gippsland, where I recently worked, did not charge students a cent to park at its regional campus in Churchill, despite there also being a bus service to the campus. Staff and students at that regional campus were provided with free and plentiful parking.

Parking has been an ongoing issue at the Deakin campus for two years. There have been protests since 2011 about the university's money grab.

In 2011 the Vice Chancellor Professor Jane den Hollander said in an email to staff that she knew the pay to park arrangements would "upset some students and staff but subsidising car parks was costing the university's core business".

“I trust that you will take some time to consider these new arrangements in the light of the need to reduce Deakin’s carbon footprint, to release more funds for Deakin’s teaching and research activities, and to keep pace with other institutions who are also working hard to reduce the demand for on-site car parking,” she wrote.

[box] She said the changes also aimed to reduce demand for parking on campuses and encourage staff and students to adopt “sustainable transport alternatives” like public transport.[/box]

Clearly, that position has not changed, even though the VC would now know of the poor public transport options for the Warrnambool campus. We are not the first to call for the university to act and support its regional staff and students, and do away with its pay-to-park farce.