

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.

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[/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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Climbing the cape: Cape Bridgewater

After living in Tasmania for a time, the bar had been set very high for bushwalking. A visit to Cape Bridgewater, however, exceeded all expectations.



The view from the top of Cape Bridgewater back to the bay is simply spectacular.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] E
xactly where the Great Ocean Road comes to an end in south-west Victoria is open to debate, but those who turn off too early – say, at Port Fairy – are missing one of the most

spectacular beaches and cliff top walks in the state.

Cape Bridgewater is only 20km west of Portland and wraps itself around a long, crescent-shaped beach that is perfect in itself for a long walk, but the real joy lies in a two-hour return walk to the tip of the cape that takes in two seal colonies.

You can prime yourself for the walk ahead with a morning coffee at the charming [Pickled Pelican café](#) in Percy St, Portland – say that three times quickly – or breakfast at the funky [Bridgewater Bay Café](#) that has absolute waterfront views. (Unlike many beach cafes, this one is open all year round).

The walk starts with steps up from the carpark about 100m west of the café, although we still managed a wrong turn and ended up on a wheelchair ramp rather than the steps, which was slightly embarrassing.



The seal viewing platform gives a birds-eye view of the wildlife.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DDCE8D;"] F
[/dropcap]rom the carpark, the track meanders high along the farmland boundary before descending to the shoreline where

[Seals by Sea Tours](#) run seasonal boat trips out to the seal colonies, cutting the travel time to a few minutes. For those who like to walk, however, the trek is just beginning.

The track rises up to the cape in a steady climb, but is still steep enough in parts to work up a sweat on a warm day and requires a reasonable level of fitness (be sure to carry a water bottle, and binoculars are also handy).

The views as you move up and along the cliff face become increasingly spectacular and are equal to those of the more famous parts of the Great Ocean Road around Port Campbell and Peterborough.

[quote type = "center"] Allow time for plenty of stops to take photos, as on a clear day, the views across the bay are vast and breathtaking.[/quote]

While the scenery alone is worth the walk, Cape Bridgewater is also home to the largest mainland colony of fur seals in Australia and there are two viewing platforms from which to watch them at rest and play.

The first platform overlooks a flat rock that is equivalent to a seal sun bed, while the second, at the end of the walk, looks down on a reef that the seals use for surfing (this is where the binoculars come in handy).

[quote type="center"] While wildlife is wonderfully unpredictable, we were lucky enough to see a dozen or more seals frolicking in the surf and catching waves like Kelly Slater.[/quote]

The geology of the area is also fascinating, with the tip of Cape Bridgewater actually part of a volcanic crater – such facts always make my head spin.

After a packed lunch, the return walk was less arduous, being mostly downhill, but equally as beautiful, with the mid-

afternoon sun shimmering on the water.

This is a walk that is not too long, not too difficult, and very rewarding: perfect for a fine spring day.



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