



Off-the-Grid

French Island - good news letter

French Island is an unusual place. Nearly twice the size of nearby Phillip island, yet it has no council, no police, no bridge access, no power or water supply, one shop, dirt roads and just over 100 permanent residents. French Island truly is **Off-the-Grid**.

Seventy percent the island is National Park. It is an ecological hot spot with vibrant wildlife, including koalas, echidnas, rare orchids and abundant birdlife. There are no foxes. Feral cats are being eradicated so it remains a haven for endangered marsupials like the Potaroo and Eastern Barred bandicoot.

We have our own way of doing things on the island, independent from the mainland and the mainstream. It's not flashy and that's how we like it.

Off-the-Grid newsletter is about life in an eccentric and remote community, just a ferry ride from the Mornington peninsula. And it's only for good news, because we can all do with more of that. None of us have ever lived through a pandemic/recession like this, not to mention the unfortunate politics of division.

Welcome aboard, we hope you enjoy the ride.

What a Load of Rubbish

For most people going to the tip is a sad experience. You sneak in – hoping no one watches - dump your rubbish and get out quick. It's a poor job.

However if you've been to the French Island tip recently you may have noticed what great shape it's in; organised, tidy and not a health hazard. On the scale of community run tips, French Island's is exceptional. And this didn't happen by accident. The community association does a great job organising the trench and recycling process, but it's volunteers that do the hard work.

We think that turning up at the tip, on a regular basis, to sort through other people's dirty trash and make the place respectable, demands special recognition. Without this effort, the tip would be an ugly mess.



Maurice and Keith recycling bottles, in Pre-COVID days

So let's celebrate our **Tip Heroes**, the people who do the hard work and give us an excellent tip. Hardcore regulars, who rarely miss a session are (in alphabetic order):

- Keith Airs
- Linda Bowden – FICA team leader
- Lois Airs
- Maurice Ralph
- Paul Henwood
- Paula Seymour
- Stephen May

There are plenty of others, who may not be there every session, but turn up when they can. We know a few but want to make sure we include all their names, in our next edition. So if you know someone who helps at the tip, even just once, please drop a note to frenchislandotg@gmail.com, because they are also **Tip Heroes**.

Barge News

The **Spirit of French Island (SOFI) Barge** is the only way, to get vehicles on/off the island. However during COVID schedules may vary, due to changing restrictions. Best idea is to ring - **0428 880 729** - to see what's possible. Here are the current prices for various travel options.

Type	Description	Full fare	Islander
Walk On	Adult 16yrs+ (children free)	\$10	
	With Bicycle, Trolley, etc	\$20	
Ride on	Mower, Quadbike, Motorbike, Polaris	\$40	
Car	Day trip: Sedan, Van, Ute, etc.	\$120	\$60
	Overnight: Visitors cars, Accommodation customers, Friend staying, etc	\$100	\$80
Trailer	6x4, Tandem, Horse float, Camper trailer, Slasher attachment, etc	\$80	\$50/\$80
Budget Truck	Small hire truck, RV, Caravan, Minibus	\$150	\$130
Medium Truck	Medium rigid truck (single axle)	\$250	\$200
Large Truck	Cattle truck, Vansteensel Tray Truck, Tip Truck, Concrete Trucks, etc.	\$300	\$250
Large Machinery	Excavator, Grader, Roller, Dozer, etc	\$400	\$300
Tractor	Note: Attachments are charged at trailer rates	\$130	\$80
Tradies	Ute, Van, Car, etc.	\$100	\$80
	Trailers - 6x4, Tandem, etc.	\$100	\$80

* All prices are charged per trip (one way). Prices are subject to change without notice as of 1st July 2020.

Trees without planting

from Bruce Chandler

During the early '80's I spent time chasing pasture over much of western NSW with 1500 head of cattle, droving the long paddock. At almost every camp we left behind a victim of the drought.

Returning to French Island for a spell, I got involved with one of the local rangers, doing horse trail rides through the national park. It was a great time, with overnight camps and plenty of repeat business. Until the government said, 'You can't do that, your horse poo is spreading weeds.'

I found that a little hard to comprehend, given that ten years earlier seven hundred cattle had been running through the same country... but that's another story. Who'd ever think that the good old pasture grasses, which were brought in to tame this wide brown land, could be damaging.

Growing up on French Island I was well aware of our wonderful and rare array of native Orchids. However I have since learnt that one of the reasons we had such things, was because a lot of our bush was never seeded down to pasture. It seems those useful pasture grasses poison the ground for native orchids. And it's been revealed, they impact gum trees as well.

My brother Chris, the former warrior for the rights of French Island's native plants, researched this and, with help from Landcare, discovered a way to grow gum trees without planting. What they did was burn off the pasture grasses, from under some old gums. Sometime later young gums began springing up from dropped seeds. It saved a lot of effort planting and the new gums were a perfect genetic match for the area.



The tree on the left is typical of a lonely old gum with nowhere to go. On the right is a similar tree after burning and the natural regeneration process. Compare it to those sad gums in the background of this picture.

Note: Pasture grasses will return, but by then the young gums are large enough to survive and prosper. This is revegetation made easy. Of course young trees will need protection from stock.

One more thing

If you like what you read, please share with family and friends. To receive copies via email add your name by clicking [New Subscriber](#). Your private details will not be shared with Russia, China... or Canberra!

Alan Pentland
Editor



To stop receiving **Off-the-Grid** send **STOP** to [Unsubscribe](#)