



Off-the-Grid

Kite – French Island

Photo Terry Martin 2020

Why? Why not?

Why is French Island so precious? Why do we cherish and want to preserve it, and the history? Why do we want to live here?

I'm sure we've got our own answers to these questions, but they vary. Recently a community "mission and vision" statement was drawn up with some bold sounding claims but little explanation. If you can't explain what you want it has poor chance of acceptance or success.

This place is precious because it remains outside the rush of development and commercialisation we see on the mainland. We are protected by our isolation. The National Park helps supports this stability, also conserving the ecology, no matter how annoying that may seem at times. Ecology is our beauty and our strength.

French Island is not, nor ever has been a noteworthy economic success. Luckily that has protected it from the ravages of over-population and opportunists. And the reason is simple, it's hard to get here. There is no bridge.

But you only need to drive along Tankerton road to see the place is looking a bit tired and those economic forces surrounding us will only get stronger. We need to be strong socially and economically to resist them. We need ideas and positive thinking - everyone can contribute and everyone can benefit. The past is over, time to create our future, a good island future.

Fabulous Ferry



Toby and Emily

Have to admit I am a big fan of the ferry, and there's good reason for that. On the weekend it's free - for senior citizens. Every Saturday morning, we all line up, ostensibly to do the shopping, but it's really just an excuse to travel abroad. Reckon many seniors would be happy just going back and forth all day, 'saving' money. I know I would.

Seriously it is a good ferry service because they understand our island needs. I did a trip a some while back where I got to mainland and discovered I'd left my car keys back on the island. Total disaster. I returned to the ferry and sheepishly admitted what I'd done. Ash, who was a deckhand at the time said, 'Take my car' and gave me her keys, just like that. Her own car. I'm sure it's not official practice but it was a wonderful gesture that saved my day and made me feel good about the world for weeks.

I think the current crews are great too, helping us load up, making the journeys enjoyable and reliable, even fishing my windblown hat out of the water. A big shout out to the regulars; Anthony and Jake, Toby and Emily (above). Apologies to other crew (past and present) whose names I don't have. Your work is appreciated too.

And then there's that moment when the boat pulls into Tankerton and people start passing bags off the boat, helping each other to get sorted as quickly as possible. I often think the tourists have never seen anything like it. Those are good times to be part of this community. Big thanks to one and all.

One final thought - some days, I'm sure Islanders would appreciate the plank being lowered earlier, giving us more than 5mins to load our shopping - at our age we need it!

A Rose by any name



Photo: Samantha Spark

Times are tough for one of the island's golden citizens, Rose Scott, or Aunty Rose as she's often known. Rose has had serious health issues over the last few months, which have kept her away from her lovely home on Coast Road. Her calm and kind presence being sadly missed.

The photo above is from happier times, unveiling the Thompson family 125 year commemoration plaque, in 2019. She's with her six daughters, from left to right Pam, Tina, Debbie, Sandra, Janice and Helen. Looks like a lot of good female energy.

Unveiling this plaque was an emotional experience. Rose said it gave her great pleasure. She was very proud of her grandparents, parents, brother and sisters, struggling through such hard times. Her daughters responded by saying they were extremely proud of their mother for making the effort to honour the family's history, now and for the future.

Rose is the last of her generation to reside on the island so this is probably a good time for reflection, a changing of the guard. She has left proud footprints for all to follow. Good on you Rose.

Information and inspiration from Lois Airs

Happy Christmas Everyone

Yes it's that time again, and what a year it has been. Here's to having a merry Christmas with those we love, plus a happy and prosperous new year. Speaking of which...



Decorations are already up for the annual French Island New Year's Eve. This is a great way to celebrate, communicate and wave 2020 a not-so-fond farewell. Fun for the whole family at the cricket ground from 1-4pm, then the evening shindig starts at 8pm in the hall. Check it out and have a great year in 2021.

Bunurong Visitors

Last month people from the Bunurong Land Council came to survey a coastal site on the island, prior to a large revegetation planting by Landcare. They were checking to see that no significant aboriginal sites would be damaged in the process. French Island was traditionally Bunurong land.

Daniel was an aboriginal man from the Geelong region. Bradley was a third generation Maltese Australian with a degree in Archaeology. Neither were from the Bunurong tribe. But that's the thing, most archaeologists are 'immigrants' of some sort. I am an immigrant too. My family hails from Scotland if you go back a few generations. Immigration is very Australian. There are also long-term islanders with a portion of aboriginal blood. So it gets complicated. As the song says, 'We are one, but we are many'.

The Bunurong people weren't permanent residents on French Island though this was seen as their land. They came here to gather food, including for mutton birds, making tools here and leaving middens. And we found some tools, cutting stones, still visible on the coastline after all those years and disturbances.

This was real archaeology in action, using science and physical evidence to help understand the history and lives of people, the people who came before us. It was very interesting.

In the end Bradley took some artefacts back to study and agreed that the planting could go ahead with no need for adjustments, Daniel said he wanted to come back and help with the planting, and we all learnt something. Then we had lunch together. It was a good day.

Stony

Where are we now? What's the app say?
Says things round here have seen better days

A wall built of rocks should last forever
but cracks have appeared
where mortar's intended to keep it together.
Cracks turn to gaps
it'll crumble to rubble without some repairs.

The asbestos roof
has flaking fibres
floating in air
we ignore or deny.
Hard winds harassing
the outdoor blinds
umbrellas flapping
one gutter's gone
timbers exposed
never meant to see light
and so the rot goes

Where?

"Stony Point Kiosk"
says the faded sign
Stony it is
at the end of the line



One Last Thing

Off-the-Grid is an unintentional publication – released on the 15th of the month.
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Good news stories welcomed

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