

Watchem township, NW Victoria

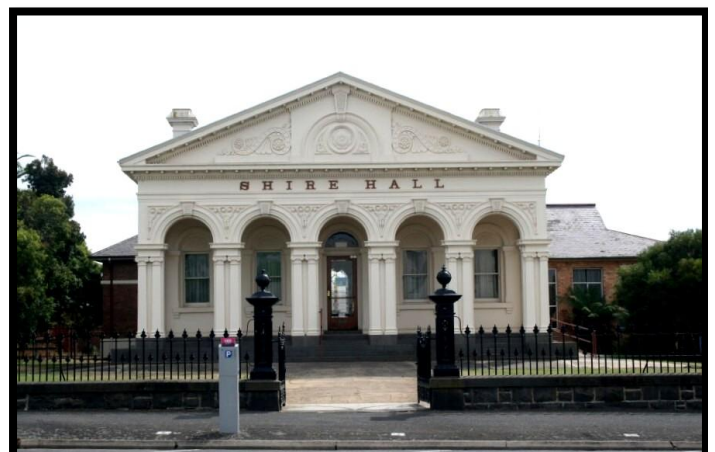


April 2017

Gday...

After spending February and March sorting out some things - just the result of 'old age' and 'wear and tear' - on the van not me - I was ready to go for a bit of a wander to some places I hadn't visited for some time - and a few I hadn't visited before.

So early April, I headed westward from Sale and spent a bit of time around the Ararat region. Ararat is a very quiet town with some elaborate and historical buildings that grace the streets of the town, including the Town Hall and Shire Hall in Barkly Street, both built in the late 1800s.

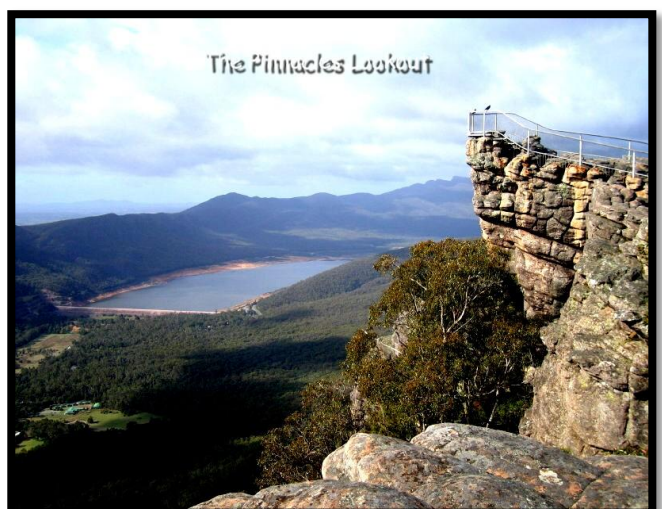
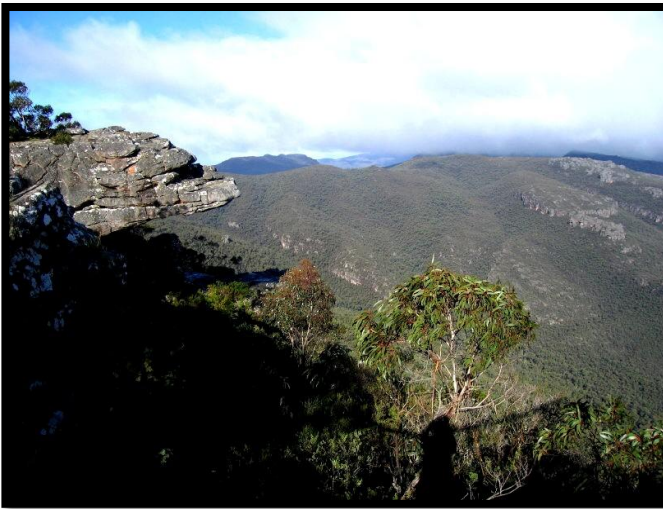


Ararat's rich gold rush history was unique in that it was the only town in Australia founded and developed by Chinese migrants. In 1857, a party of Chinese miners en route to the Central Victorian gold fields struck gold at the Canton Lead which transformed into a boomtown and continued to prosper until the turn of the 20th century. Rapid growth brought about a municipality, which was incorporated as a borough on 24 September 1858.

I set up camp at the Green Hill Lake Reserve and spent some time checking out the surrounding areas. This is an excellent camping spot with all the amenities, including hot showers - all for a \$5 per night donation.



Nearby is the Grampians National Park and I had not visited since the late 1990s. Halls Gap hasn't changed very much and the Grampians are still a spectacular place for bushwalking.



Nearby to Ararat is the Langi Ghiran State Park and I hadn't visited here since the early 1980s so it was refreshing to visit and see how well developed the camping area was - with the walk to the reservoir still a pleasant track through the bush that had not been improved - still just a track.

There are two reservoirs in the park which were built from local granite blocks in the 1880s. The main reservoir forms part of Ararat's water supply with a small holding dam nestled in the bush that the walk goes past.





The Ngutuwul balug or "mountain people" of the Dwab wurrung tribe occupied this area. There are four rock art sites, numerous shelters and scar trees throughout the area. I visited one of these rock art cave sites - Lar-ne-jeering (Langi Ghiran) - which is from the Djab Wurrung language meaning 'home of the black cockatoo'.

I headed off from the Ararat area and headed down near Portland to camp at the mouth of the Fitzroy River. This was a pleasant spot - particularly if you are into fishing and boating.



After being so close to the beach I needed to get some bush trees around me so I headed to a camp spot that I had been told about called Sawpit Reserve, just north of Narrawong.

This was a very pleasant camp tucked up in the bush with no neighbours.

With my need for being in the bush whetted, my next stop was just north of Heywood at a camp within the Annys State Forest. Again, a nice open space (good for the solar panels charging the battery) with no-one around for me to annoy.



There were quite a few roos around in the late afternoons and I found a little mate tucked up in a tree. He was more interested in sleeping all day until it was time to nibble on some leaves.

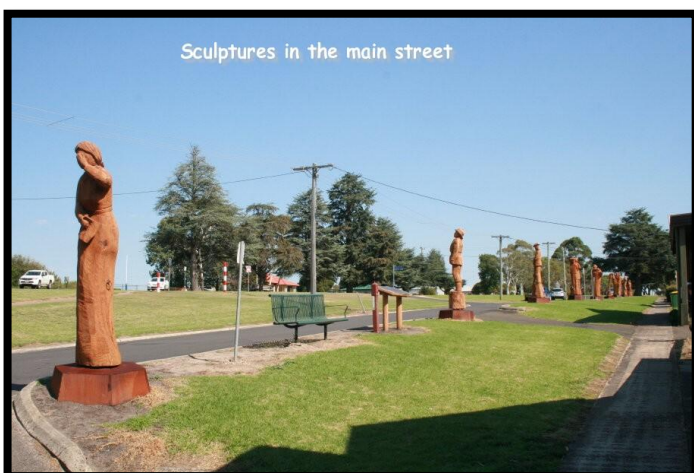


With the weather being very kind I decided to check out the Fort O'Hare camp area on the Glenelg River at Dartmoor in the far west of Victoria. Before the Dartmoor township was established the location was known as Woodford Inn. The township was settled in the late 1850s with a Post Office opening on 1 April 1860



The Atlantic Cedar trees which made up Dartmoor's original avenue of honour in the main street were planted in 1918 and had been hacked into over the years by power companies and the like and were starting to present some dangers. A decision was made to retain the stumps of the trees and have them carved into a series of statues and sculptures which would reflect some of the local stories and experiences of World War One on a small country town.

Chainsaw sculptor Kevin Gilders was engaged, and slowly the works started to emerge. Unfortunately the trees are continuing to decline, and there are fears the sculptures may not last too much longer.



Heading north from Dartmoor I eventually found a nice camp on the banks of Lake Watchem just outside of the lovely little town of Watchem.

The first farm selections in the Watchem area occurred in 1873 and a town survey was made in 1875. The railway line was extended beyond Donald to Watchem and Birchip in 1893. A Catholic school was opened in 1893 and a government school in 1895. The Victorian municipal directory for 1893 also recorded a hotel, store and church at Watchem, which was described as a rising township. Interestingly, the population never really grew and today there is still only a hotel, store and church and very few homes but no schools.



It was a very pleasant camp right on the water with ducks and geese swimming by. It was almost luxurious actually, as there were even hot showers in the amenities block. It was lovely watching the sun set each night from my front door.



I had often travelled the Calder Highway and passed by Lake Tyrrell so I thought I should take this opportunity to actually stop and visit the place.

Lake Tyrrell is a unique salt lake and is host to Mallee reptiles, kangaroos, emus and white-faced chats. Thousands of seagulls breed on small islands on the lake which was formed as a result of the inundation of the Murray-Darling Basin through sea level rise and its subsequent retreat; the present landscape and soils were formed as a result of this process.



The lake itself is quite ancient and is believed to have been formed by drifting sand blocking the passage of Tyrrell Creek. Over time it became a giant salt basin due to the flow of subterranean saline water and the run-off from Tyrrell Creek.



So there ya have it - another month on the road. I am currently back in Sale helping the local economy. As usual there are some family issues that mean I have to stay fairly close so don't know when I might get away for a quick trip to somewhere in the bush.

I hope you are all well and getting ready for the winter.

*Cheers
rockylizard*

