

# ***“Alltrails”***

## **Rail trail six pack**

**2021**



**Coast, Craters and Gold**  
**6 Days, 6 Rail trails—260 kms**  
**2-7 March 2021**



On the second of March 2021 Susan and I joined with 15 others on a supported cycling adventure organised by Alltrails cycling and walking tours company.

This is our story of that event encompassing 6 separatee rail trails in Victoria over 6 days.



A great big thank you to Richard and Lou for all their work, assistance, guidance and encouragement on the road.

Thanks also to Jo and Midge back in the office for their contribution to our adventure.

We also greatly appreciated the high quality of the food and accommodation along the way.





## DAY one, Warrnambool to Port Fairy 41kms

The original plan to take the train to Warrnambool was stymied by line works so we took the Alltrails bus instead resulting in a rather late start for our 40 km ride to Port Fairy

Right from the start there were some problems loading all the bikes;- Richard had gone to some trouble and expense with a roof mounted bike securing system. A plan that would have worked well for conventional bicycles, however most of the tour had turned up with large, heavy e-bikes that could not be safely secured to the new racking system. With the result that Jo had to make a special trip up from Melbourne with a new trailer that meant, while improved, the situation was still not perfect.



Once under way we were blest with beautiful over water vistas as we left Warrnambool along the foreshore promenade. Ocean, rock formations, deep gravel and stairs. Did I mention stairs? Hauling the trikes up the stairs onto the boardwalk would have been almost impossible without Gwyn's welcome assistance..

Once past the stair challenge and a short diversion created by a lack of signage, the trail skirted along the Merri River. The rest of the ride was mainly gentle grades, mostly exposed with off and on, mostly off, sunshine. We were rather cold on arrival at Port Fairy. Along the way, part of the group become geographically challenged causing Gwyn to sprint off to round them up. Once approaching town the familiar arrows securely guided us to our accommodation at Seacombe House..





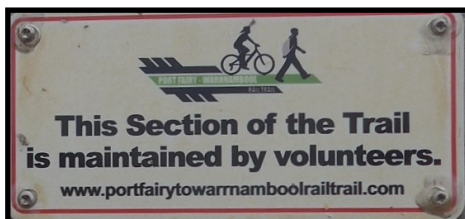






Built in 1853, the associated heritage listed cottages served as banking chambers, and borough offices, and now house three four star apartments; old world charm and comfort, with garden setting just steps outside the door.

That evening all enjoyed a Victorian Hotel grand dinner featuring monster steaks followed by affogatos in an historic hotel. New Alltrails jerseys all round not all of which did fit but much appreciated never the less.



The Eastern Maar people are the traditional owners of the Port Fairy area.

In the early 19th century whalers and seal hunters used the coast in this region. The bay is reported to have been named by the crew of the sealing cutter *The Fairy* (Captain James Wishart) in 1828.

In the 1840s, significant conflict between pastoral squatters and aboriginals occurred. In 1842, 27 squatters from the Port Fairy neighbourhood signed a letter to Superintendent Charles Latrobe reporting many 'outrages' committed by the 'natives' and requesting the government provide security. These clashes, later known as the Eumeralla Wars, formed part of the battle over land use and resources between traditional owners and Europeans across Victoria's western district.





## Day two. Camperdown to Timboon 32kms



Also known as the Crater to Coast trail recognising the trail's start on open volcanic plains of Corangamite and connections to the coast at Port Campbell via the 12 Apostles trail.

Started the day by bus to Camperdown along a highway flanked by miles and miles of dry stone walls; a journey interrupted by a call from last night's accommodation advising that Susan's eye drops were still in the motel fridge. Thankfully we managed to organise a fresh script to be available at the Timboon pharmacy.

Our ride started at Lake Bullen Merri with a steep climb up to the road. Susan and some others elected to take the bus to the top of the hill. On arrival at a steep rough pitch in the middle of the golf course I waited for Susan to assist her getting through. We then rode on until encountering more navigational challenges around the Fontera Factory at Cobden. A situation sorted by a passing farmer in his ute who pointed us in the right direction and we in turn did the same

favour for Rosemary and June coming along behind.

Being advised that the 7km stretch before Gurdies Bridge was too rough and narrow for the trikes I took to the alternative road route and Susan along with June and Rosemary did the same leg in the bus. That 5km advised diversion turned out to be 14km partly on the seal and mostly on steep, loose gravel corrugations that did make that leg rather challenging. From the bridge an easy, scenic rail trail ride into Timboon and Susan's new eyedrops. The ride ended adjacent to the Timboon Railway Shed Distillery where an assortment of spirits are distilled and available for sale.

Then on to our penthouse room at the Loch Ard inn and after a few pre dinner drinks at the "Sow and Piglet" bar/brewery; dinner at the 12 Rocks Café, Port Campbell. While we were enjoying the beer and ambience at the brewery a few hardy souls went for a dip in the ocean.









### Day Three

## Beech Forest Banool to Colac on the Old Beech Trail 34kms



Alarm off at 5.30 in the glasshouse/penthouse with a spa bath with views over the inlet, followed by breakfast down the street at Waves restaurant. . Then on the bus for the obligatory tourist look at the 12 Apostles rock formations and the Loch Ard gorge. Awesome scenery and overwhelming emotions when trying to imagine the struggles of the only survivors of the Loch Ard disaster. Then back on the bus through the forest to the Fly Otway visitor's centre tree top walk. Absolutely loved the forest experience and being on a time schedule avoided making the "to zip line or not zip line" decision.

Breath taking birds-eye-views of the magnificent Otway Ranges from the World's tallest treetop walk. The 600 metre-long, 25 metre-high, elevated walkway provided unrivalled views of the unique beauty of the region's flora and fauna, from the rainforest floor up into the soaring heights of the treetops and featuring a 45 metre tall Spiral Tower and the cantilever perched above Young's Creek – a truly exhilarating experience. And we thought that the 1.9km forest walk in and out was experience enough on its own.

A serious pre-ride briefing and threatening weather led Susan and a few others to believe that trees, rocks and surf were enough excitement for one day. For those on their bikes a great ride complete with some challenges and excitement. In the steep loose gravel climbs the trike was losing traction with the back wheel spinning and failing to progress. Then came the gates!. Normally gates I can deal with, however these were cunningly designed to thwart horse riders and motorcyclists and in the process made my life damned difficult. On one occasion being so challenging that the only way through was to physically pick the trike up and carry it, with much appreciated assistance, over the gate.

The gates had been installed to protect the interests of the private land holders who generously allow their land to be used for trail riding/walking. Parts of the ride were through magnificent eucalypts and blackwoods as well as some pine forest. We traversed too quickly to either notice or enjoy the birdlife but did encounter mobs of kangaroos.





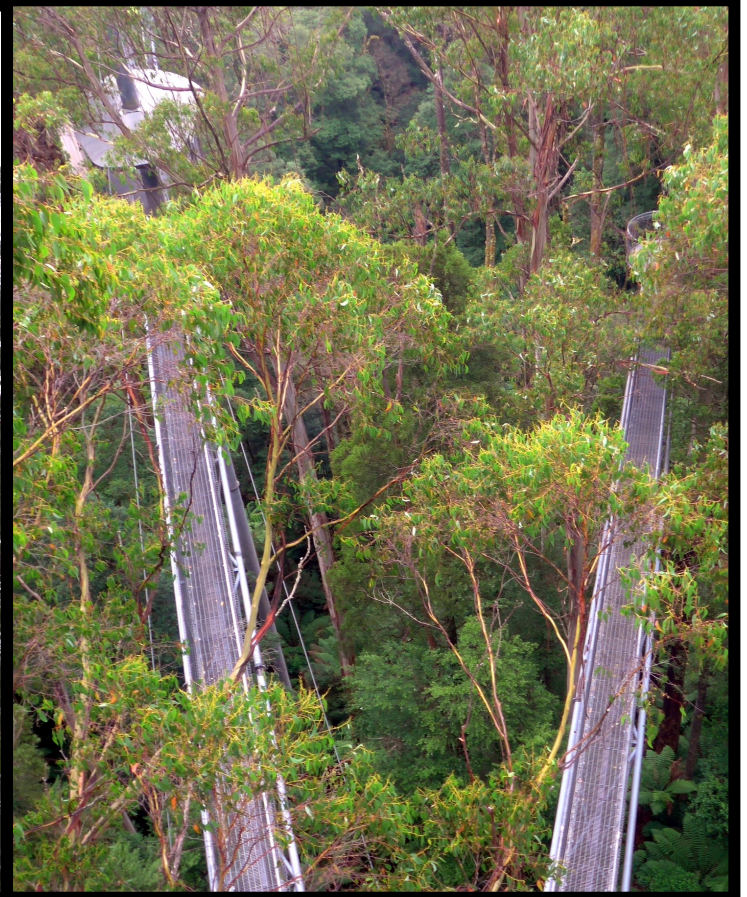
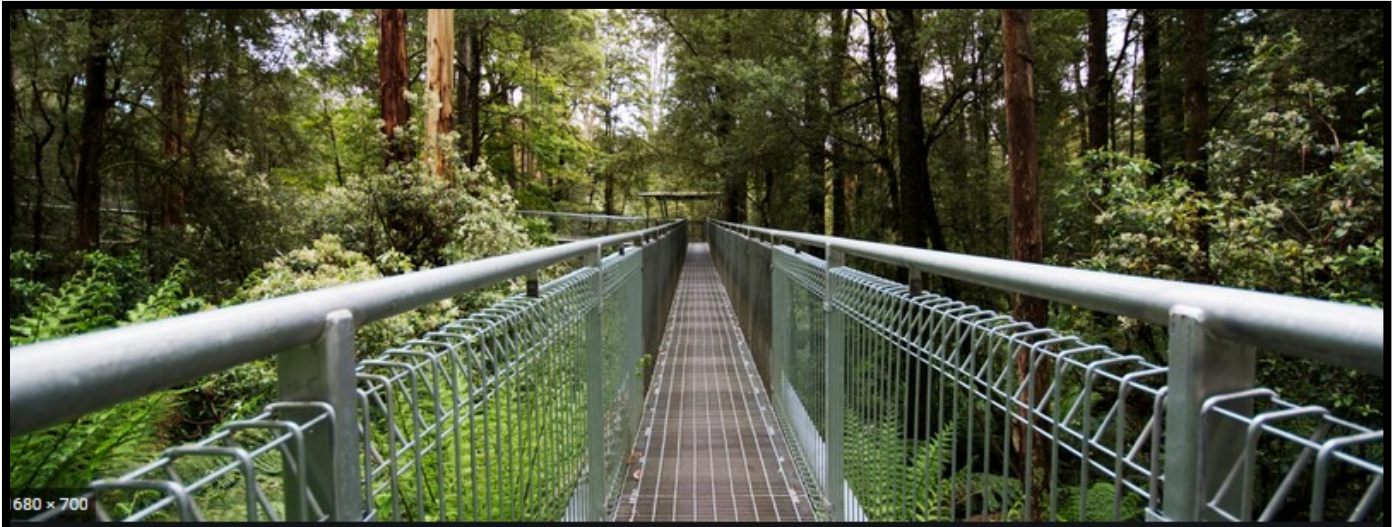
Interestingly enough I did not see any other wild life on this tour possibly more a comment on me than the environment.

The came the down hill section:- a long stretch of deep loose gravel between horrendous corrugations led to an exciting ride nudging the edge of panic and loss of control. Once over that there was another long down hill on the asphalt where the trike came into its own streaming past the e-bikers revelling in their 55kph run.

And so to bed at the Baronga Motor inn Colac.











George and Annis Bills Horse Troughs - after making various bequests in his 1925 will, George Bills left the residue of his substantial estate - derived from the Bills' Wire Mattress factory - in the care of Trustees to be invested at their discretion, with the income derived to be used for the construction and erection of horse troughs 'wherever they may be of the opinion that such horse troughs may be necessary or desirable for the relief of horses or other dumb animals'. As a result, these troughs can be found in many Australian country towns, often with a little side trough for dogs.



## Day 4 Skipton to Ballarat Rail trail 64km.



The first 37kms to Smythesdale a very good ride for me not so good for Susan who was having trouble with the gear selection on her trike meaning that she had to force her machine along in high gear for most of the way. A damned good effort!. We put her machine on the trailer from there.

The café at Smythesdale was completely overwhelmed by the influx of cyclists. I eventually gave up on waiting for a toastie and got back on the trail.



For the rest of the journey an enjoyable ride into the gold country with a few very down and ups through gullies, a trestle bridge or two to admire, especially the magnificent restored Nimmons bridge. At the end of the trail we became completely bushed, a situation solved by some workmen. They after consulting and criticising our map put us in the right direction from where we picked up the arrows and smooth sailing around the lake and through the city to the Ansonia Hotel. Enquiries about the buildings architecture elicited that our rooms had once been stables and the courtyard where we stored the bikes had been a coach builder's yard. After the horses had left the alley between the rows of stables became an open air market that was eventually enclosed by a glass atrium and re modelled as a hotel.





Nimmons bridge





We concluded the evening with a slap up dinner at Craigs Royal Hotel a magnificent, opulent gold rush era building.



Craig's is one of the most historic hotels in Ballarat, and is significant as the site of the Royal Commission into the Eureka Stockade, a temporary Ballarat Town Hall, the scene of a huge recruitment ball with fugitive American Civil War fighters from the CSS Shenandoah, the workplace of famed poet Adam Lindsay Gordon, resting place for the visiting Mark Twain, and birthplace of the Melbourne Racing Club, originators of the Caulfield Cup.



*"The wealth, beauty and fashion of Ballarat were out in full force... every attention that kindness and courtesy could suggest was shown us, and more than one heart beat quicker at such convincing evidence of the existence of sympathy in this country of the Antipodes, for the service in which we were engaged. Many a grey uniform coat lost its gilt buttons that night, but we saw them again ere we bade a final adieu to Australia, suspended from watch guards depending from the necks of bright-eyed women..."*  
Cornelius Hunt, *The Shenandoah* 1865"

After a bit of fossicking around I found a section of the especially commissioned carpet that was laid for the royal visit of Prince Albert in 1867









## DAY 5

### Castlemaine to Maldon

### 2\*17kms

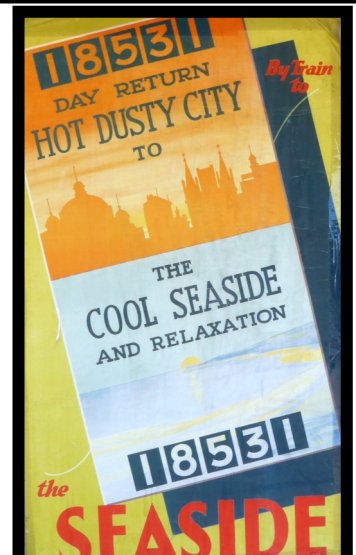
The day commenced with a stop at Daylesford where we managed to share a few moments with my daughter Miranda; one of whose productions was a feature of the Chill Out Festival. Miranda and I did the Copenhagen-Paris trip with Richard. Then it was on to Hepburn Springs for a short pause before heading on to the trail start at Castlemaine.

This trail is not a rail trail as such. Rail trails follow the old railway alignment, sharing the benefits of levelled and filled track, steady gentle grades and sweeping bends. Rather this trail is a bush track established as a service road for the railway. Consequently it is characterised by tree roots, loose gravel, rocks, twists and turns, washouts and steep descents and climb-outs of creek beds and gullies, as it wanders through open dry forest with the occasional glimpse of open farm land. Some more experienced riders and those of fat-tired e-bikes had no trouble with the track others were not so generous in their description and a few were genuinely distressed by the challenge.

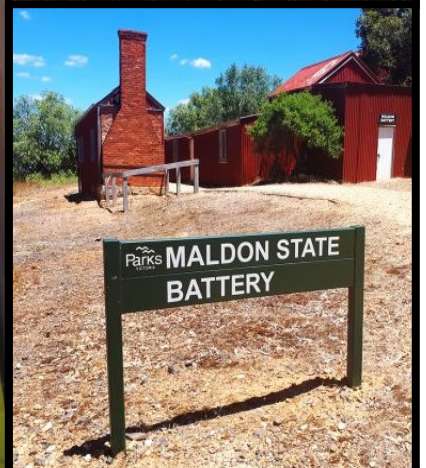
For my part I arrived at Maldon bruised and bleeding. The track itself I managed with some effort but when I inadvertently followed Gwyn off on some GPS heading 'short cut' I found myself caught on a rock shelf narrower than my wheel base and inclined towards the creek bed. There was nothing that I could do other than tuck in my arms and legs and await for the inevitable tumble down into the gully, winding up on my back pinned under the trike. With no one else around I had no option but to struggle up-right and manhandle my machine along the creek bed until I joined the official track and on to Maldon.













**Day 6**  
**Heathcote to Bendigo**  
**on the O'Keefe Rail Trail 51kms.**



After an early 6am start we left our luxury Colonial Inn suite and bussed off through the sunrise to Heathcote.

A good easy ride on a well formed and maintained path through box-ironbark and yellow gum woodland and some obviously productive farmland.



A morning tea stop in the recreational reserve at Axedale and on to Bendigo where the arrows lead us around the lake and through the botanical gardens to our lunch outside the Bendigo Art Gallery.

Thence on the bus again for the run to Southern Cross station and our farewells.







COVID Contact Tracing  
SCAN & REGISTER



**CRAIG'S**  
ROYAL HOTEL BALLAARAT

## GALLERY MENU

### To Start

Chickpea Hummus - Polenta Crackers	5.00
Beef Crackling - Salt & Vinegar	7.50
Devilled Whitebait - Yoghurt Tartare	7.50
Cheese & White Anchovy Croute	5.00
House Made Focaccia - Mt Zero Olives	10.00

### Entree

Salt Kitchen Charcuterie - Mustard - Pickles - House Made Breads	22.00	32.00
Hot & Cold Appellation Oysters	8.50	Pair
Char Grilled Cuttlefish - Chorizo - Chimichurri - Lemon Pangrattato	18.00	
Western Plains Suckling Pig Terrine - Sauerkraut - Pickled Walnuts	22.00	
Poached Ora King Salmon - Yarra Valley Caviar - Parsley Oil	21.00	
Sher Wagyu Beef Tartare - House Mustard - Gaufrette Potatoes	22.00	
Charcuterie Croquetas - Smoked Paprika Aioli - Manchego	18.00	
Honey Glazed Halloumi - Toasted Croûte - Nigella Seeds	17.00	
A Tasting of Land, Sea & Air	36.00	

Black & White Linguine Ala Marinara - Chilli - Garlic	25.00	34.00
Local Mushroom Spaghetti - Taleggio - Parmesan	23.00	32.00
Caramelle - Ricotta - Tomato - Watercress - Salata	24.00	33.00
Gnocchi Primavera - Meredith Goats Curd - Olive Crumb	23.00	32.00

### Main

Sher Wagyu Steak - Frites	38.00
Ora King Salmon - Asparagus - Poached Hens Egg	36.00
Western Plains Pork Cotoletta - Charred Broccolini - Charcuterie Sauce	38.00
Crumbed Market Fish - Broccolini - X.O Dressing - Sheep's Yoghurt	28.00
Butchers Cut of southern Ranges Beef <b>For 2 to Share</b>	90.00
Chopped Green Salad - Toasted Sesame - Fetta dressing, Hand Cut Fries	

### Salads & Vegetable

Broccolini - X.O Dressing - Sheep's Yoghurt	12.00	Leek & Tarragon Gratin	12.00
Chopped Green Salad - Toasted Sesame - Fetta dressing	10.00	Hand Cut Fries	10.00



## Would we do it again?

Yes please!! The overall experience was a most enjoyable few days shared with a cohort of people whose company we really enjoyed. It was my fourth tour with Alltrails and Susan's second cycle touring adventure.

Although next time we will restrict our trike riding to sealed surfaces, some of the tracks this time were not really trike suitable, much less so that when we did a similar tour of the rail trails in Gippsland.

I cannot speak highly enough of Richard and Jo's un-fussed professionalism despite some serious challenges that were thrown at them along the way as they strive to rebuild their business in the wake of the Covid lockdowns..

[www.davidsusan.com/Theride.pdf](http://www.davidsusan.com/Theride.pdf)

tells my version of the 2018 Alltrails Copenhagen—Paris ride and

<http://www.davidsusan.com/sixpack.pdf>

Susan and my experience of the Gippsland rail trails.

## Why ride a trike?

### The pros;-

Comfort. Susan with almost nil bike touring experience rode for 6 hours with no pain.

Trikes are comfortable; trike riders know nothing of butt butter nor of chamois cream.

Trikes are fast on the flat and seriously fast on the downhill.

Trikes are very stable and will not fall over if you go too slow, or are waiting at the lights.

Nor do they wobble all over the place when very slow.

They are fun.

With their wide track and low centre of gravity trikes are very stable at speed.

Trike riders arrive at an accident feet first not head first.

On steep climbs where bicycles wobble and struggle a trike-rider selects a very low gear and just keeps spinning. I've never struck an incline that I could not climb on my trike. However if the surface is either dry sand or very greasy one can get into a situation whereby the back wheel just spins and fails to propel the trike forward.

Did I mention fun?

### Real cons;-

Trikes are heavy,

When you are not riding them trikes are heavy, awkward devices that are not easy to store or to transport.

On gentle to moderate climbs a trike's extra weight renders them slow and hard climbers.

### Perceived cons.

Hard to see in traffic. Because of their novelty factor drivers notice trikes whereas bikes are so common that they can become psychologically invisible. As well as my trike I ride a bicycle, in my experience traffic gives me much more room when I am on the trike.