Historical Driver’s Guide to the Great Ocean Road

Featuring Local History & Maps Points of Interest Interpretive Plaques

Ross J Bastiaan
INTRODUCTION

In 1919 the construction of the Great Ocean Road commenced. Over the following 13 years almost 3000 men, young veterans of the First World War and others manually toiled with only picks, shovels, wheelbarrows and explosives to carve the road through some of the world’s most hostile terrain.

The road opened up Victoria’s spectacular west coast, unlocked remote isolated coastal villages and brought international recognition to the region. But above all, for them, the road symbolised a living war memorial to their fallen comrades and a lasting testament to a generation that sacrificed their future for our today. The Great Ocean Road is recognised as an iconic tourist destination, attracting millions of visitors from across the globe.

To celebrate the 75th anniversary of the opening of the Great Ocean Road, a series of commemorative bronze plaques were cast from 2007. Hand sculptured by Dr Ross Bastiaan, and weighing 85 kilograms, the plaques features information on the broad history of the road, a central detailed relief map of the area and information specific to the site they occupy. This traveller’s guide to the Great Ocean Road is designed to follow the trail of these plaques along the world’s largest war memorial.

GETTING STARTED

This driver’s guide highlights the main points of interest along the full 240 kilometre length of the Great Ocean Road, from Torquay to Allansford.

Maps and pictures help to explain the location of key points of interest, many linked to the 14 bronze information plaques all located on the stunning ocean side of the road.

The journey begins at the first bronze plaque at the Torquay roundabout near the intersection of Bell Street and the Surf Coast Highway.

For most of the journey from Anglesea to Apollo Bay the Great Ocean Road hugs the coast. From Apollo Bay the road moves inland through tall timber forests around Lavers Hill, before re-joining the coast at Princetown, close to The Twelve Apostles and Port Campbell. The road then heads inland again, past Peterborough, to eventually join the Princes Highway (A1) at Allansford.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

Surf Coast Shire, Colac Otway Shire and Corangamite Shire acknowledge the Kulin and Maar Nations, on whose land the Great Ocean Road passes through.

We pay respect to Kulin and Maar Elders, and all of the traditional Custodians of this Country, past, present and future.
The Great Ocean Road was built as a memorial to the Victorians who served in World War One (1914-18). In 1932, the section from Eastern View to Apollo Bay was completed, opening this spectacular coastal area to tourism and development.

Although a coastal road had been conceptualised for decades, it was not until 1918 that a route was pegged and the Great Ocean Road Trust established. This trust was a private company that raised money and oversaw part of the Great Ocean Road construction from 1918 to 1936. Their initial fundraising provided 81,000 pounds (A$8.5 Million), with subsequent toll gate proceeds and government grants of land for public auction further supplementing construction costs. Today many of the houses along the more remote sections of the Great Ocean Road have been built on these original blocks of land. The Victorian State Government was reluctant to fund the construction of the road, so the additional money required was raised through the Returned Services League and local communities.

Construction of the first section, Lorne to the Cumberland River, began in September 1919 with a workforce made up of returned soldiers and other individuals. The work was slow and the project underfunded and so, by 1920, community pressure forced the relocation of the initial two work teams (each consisting of 150 men) to the Lorne to Aireys Inlet section of the road. The work was tough but the returned soldiers were well paid and for many, living in close quarters in a communal environment was reminiscent of their recent war-time experience. The connection to the wartime experiences of its builders is evident today in the places along the road named after battlefield sites.

The Lorne to Aireys Inlet section of the road was officially opened in March 1922. It was a single lane, unsealed road with few guard rails. Traffic was often one-way, but as speed was limited, accidents were fortunately rare. A tollhouse was installed along this section at Grassy Creek.

For the next decade, hundreds of men at a time toiled in rugged, wild terrain, building the road between Cape Patton and Lorne for the Great Ocean Road Trust and between Cape Patton and Apollo Bay for the Country Roads Board. Huge boulders, steep escarpments falling to the sea below and flooding rivers were gradually overcome in an era of ‘pick and shovel’ road construction.

As the volume of traffic grew, the road was widened and safety improved, including the road’s partial metalling from 1934. The toll was removed in 1936 when the Great Ocean Road Trust relinquished control of the Great Ocean Road to the State Government.
The journey starts here in Torquay. The first plaque is located at the roundabout where the Surf Coast Highway meets the Great Ocean Road. Spiring Creek and the RACV Torquay Resort are just after here.

Torquay is the birthplace of the global surf industry and the official start of the Great Ocean Road (GOR). The Indigenous Wathaurung people were the original occupants of the Torquay area and provided shelter to escaped convict William Buckley from 1803 to 1835.

One of the first European settlers in the area, Robert Zeally (the namesake of Zeally Bay), took up land in 1851. By the 1860s, the beautiful beaches and the Spring Creek picnic area were attracting day trippers from Geelong, 22 kilometres away. Settlers developed Jan Juc and opened the region’s first school in 1861. By the 1870s, campers and fishermen had established a township called Spring Creek, which had a wine café and boarding house.

A public land sale in 1886 enabled more housing around Spring Creek and the town became Victoria’s first seaside resort, complete with public lawns, picnic grounds and promenades. Spring Creek was renamed Torquay in 1892 to avoid confusion with other similarly named places in the colony, and because some of the town’s residents were originally from the seaside town of Torquay, England.

In 1936, Torquay was gazetted as the official start of the Great Ocean Road. During World War Two, Deep Creek, a few kilometres behind this plaque, was a large training base for 4,500 soldiers and Point Addis had an extensive air force training range that stretched seaward to Wye River. Torquay was almost lost in 1940 when bushfires destroyed 90 homes.

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The vibrant Anglesea community has witnessed considerable expansion in recent years, with a new generation seeking a relaxed ‘tree and sea change’ lifestyle in a town that takes pride in being the place where the Great Ocean Road first comes into contact with the sea. Anglesea was originally known as part of the Kuarka Dorla area and inhabited by the Wathaurung people.

European settlers first brought sheep farming here in the 1850s, when the area was known as Swampy Creek. Adventurous early holiday makers rode through dense iron bark forests to camp beside the Anglesea River, with its abundance of rock pools teeming with fish and crayfish. Pastoralists subdivided their runs and began selling allotments for holiday cottages and boarding houses. Boating, hunting, picnicking and swimming drew many families. Downstream, the annual New Year’s Day Regatta began in 1911, formalising a more casual previous event that was first staged in 1887. Boat sheds and bathing boxes abounded. Scout, church and fitness camps flourished, with many of these remaining today.

Cobb & Co. coaches originally brought visitors, supplies and the mail to the small town, but these were replaced by motor vehicles by 1918. The opening of the Great Ocean Road in the 1920s further stimulated Anglesea’s growth and the State Government established extensive pine plantations in 1924.

During World War Two, an air observation post operated at the lookout overlooking the reefs where the ships Hereford (in 1881) and Inverlochy (in 1902) were wrecked. In 1967 a brown coal open-cut mine and power station were established to supply the Alcoa aluminium plant at Point Henry, Geelong. The station closed in 2015.

For over a century bushfires have caused damage to the local flora, fauna and property in the Anglesea area, with the 1983 ‘Ash Wednesday’ fires destroying 142 houses.

The plaque at Urquhart Bluff tells the story of the early exploration of the region and the early problems encountered with road building prior to 1920. William Urquhart, a land surveyor, set the first land boundaries in this area in 1846. In 1918, the original road servicing this area was over a kilometre inland from the bluff and completely bypassed Aireys Inlet. The road was undulating, unreliable and unpopular. By contrast, a shorter 13 kilometre well-surfaced and scenic private coastal road was developed by a local landowner. To defray maintenance costs, he charged motorists to travel on this road from 1924 to 1930, before the Great Ocean Road Trust took over its tolling. Nowadays the Great Ocean Road follows this route, providing access to the beaches on this stunning coastal section. Weather and the elements have always affected the road and it was washed away at Hutt Gully Creek by heavy rains in 1954.

The Great Otway National Park is 7.4 km from Anglesea. The Great Ocean Road borders much of the 103,000 hectare Great Otway National Park, stretching from Torquay through to Princetown and up through the Otway’s hinterland towards Colac. To the south the park features tall cliffs, rugged coastlines, sandy beaches, rock platforms and windswept heathland and in the north, tall forests, ferny gullies, magnificent waterfalls and tranquil lakes. These habitats provide a home for more than 32 species of mammal, 171 bird species, 12 species of reptile, six of amphibians and nine of freshwater fish. Around Aireys Inlet, the northern part of the park is drier with heathlands of great floral diversity. Vegetation in the park includes; heathland, temperate rainforest, wet sclerophyll and dry sclerophyll forest with blue gum, mountain ash and messmate, and in spring the varied wildflowers add a splash of colour.

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Named after an early squatter, John Eyrie, the township of Aireys Inlet was the end point of the Cobb & Co. stagecoaches from Geelong. The town grew slowly after the Split Point Lighthouse began operating in 1891.

Aireys Inlet offers visitors serenity and tranquillity with spectacular cliffs, beautiful cove beaches, a picturesque river valley and the Great Otway National Park as a scenic backdrop.

The Bark Hut is located in the Allan Noble Sanctuary off the Great Ocean Road. The 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires destroyed the original building which had stood since 1857. The current building, a loving re-creation, is an interesting replica of the kind of early homestead in the area.

Split Point Lighthouse, is a must visiting Aireys Inlet, with Fairhaven beach beyond and the start of cliff top sections of the Gor. The 34 metre tall Split Point Lighthouse is visible for 30 km seaward and is open for tours daily with a fascinating history.

Beyond Aireys Inlet is Fairhaven, with its surf life saving club and long stretch of magnificent beach. At Moggs Creek, surf fishing is popular and the houses in this area are almost as stunning as the natural surrounds. From here the cliff top section of the Great Ocean Road begins.

The Memorial Arch commemorates the construction of the road and has come to symbolise the sacrifice made by so many in World War One. It is one of the best known landmarks along the Great Ocean Road.

The current Memorial Arch is the fourth to be erected at this site with fire, storm and road widening removing the previous three. An earlier, simple arch stood over the old original tollgate at Grassy Creek near Devils Elbow.

At the Arch is a large bronze sculpture, ‘The Diggers’, by Julie Squiers. The sculpture was erected in 2007 to mark the 75th anniversary of the Great Ocean Road and to focus on the role that the returned soldiers of World War One had in building the road. The adjacent bronze plaque tells these men’s wartime stories and why this road will be forever linked to them.

Three thousand Australian men, mainly returned soldiers and sailors of World War One built the Great Ocean Road. Most had survived a terrible world war in which 330,000 Australians volunteered to fight in Europe, Turkey and the Middle East. Of these 60,000 were killed and 160,000 were wounded. The casualty rate of more than 64% was higher than that of any other nation engaged and Australia’s highest in any war. From a population of just 5 million people this loss of life had immense repercussions for decades to come.

Finding employment for the returned servicemen was a crucial factor in their rehabilitation to civilian life. Many had had their original pre-war jobs preserved and some took up soldier-settler farms subsidised by the government.

In post-war Victoria, the Great Ocean Road project offered returned servicemen the chance to again work in the open air and share mateship. The majority of the workforce were returned servicemen, all employed with good pay and conditions. Although funding by the State Government was restrictive and irregular, the Returned Services League (RSL) and local communities generously supported the project.
The Great ocean road was built over 12 years by 3,000 returned servicemen and an estimated 500 men on State Government unemployment benefits.

Employment was principally earmarked for these returned soldiers and sailors to assist in their reintegration into society and also to recognise their contribution to the nation during World War One. The men were organised into work gangs of 12 to 20 or more men. Rarely were more than two to three gangs employed at any one time, as government funding to the Great Ocean Road Trust was frequently inadequate.

The men lived in well organised tented camps with separate tents for dining, administration and recreation, often with a piano, gramophone and daily newspapers. Throughout the building of the road there were at least 14 mobile work camps, with the main ones at Eastern View, Grassy Creek, Big Hill Creek, Sheoak River, Cumberland River and Wye River. Most camps had a vegetable garden, cook, blacksmith, tool sharpener and manager. Lunch was brought onsite and at night a hot meal was always provided. The men were well paid at ten shillings and sixpence for an eight-hour day and worked weekdays with a half day on Saturday. Most men were married, but women were not allowed onsite, so at weekends some left the area to see family. Those who stayed at the camps often went fishing or shooting.

The work was physically hard and daylight often defined the working hours. No heavy machinery was available, so pick, shovel and wheelbarrow work predominated. Horses, with carts and scoops, cleared debris, whilst dynamite shattered sheer rock faces to force the road across seemingly impassable terrain. Some men had suffered wartime ‘shell shock’ and found this dynamiting traumatic. Despite the often treacherous conditions, no lives were lost in the construction period.

As the Great Depression loomed in 1929, the Great Ocean Road provided continuous, valuable work for the returned servicemen and a community spirit, reminiscent of their war years.

When the Great Ocean Road was fully opened in 1932, ongoing maintenance and improvement work passed from the Great Ocean Road Trust to the State Government. Through the Country Roads Board and now VicRoads, the road continues to be maintained, despite some of Victoria’s most challenging road conditions.

The tent cities were located in various sections of the road during the construction years. Each man had his own tent and life was orderly and simple.
6 km from Big Hill look out

Big Hill was a major obstacle in the construction of the Great Ocean Road. In 1920, men toiled for months to clear this elevated section of the road, from which Lorne can be seen to the west. Their labour was in part paid for by the public land sale of 160 surrounding building blocks and the road was opened two years later.

The whole west coast is rich in maritime history. In 1800 the British viewed this coast from a distance and in 1802 the French explored, but found no landing place. The next 30 years witnessed only whalers and sealers. Land settlement began in Portland around 1834, with settlements developing in Apollo Bay in 1850 and in Lorne by 1853. Expansion was slow, as the Otway ranges blocked road access to these villages and the unpredictable sea was their only supply route.

Shipping along this coast has always been difficult, as the winds and currents can be treacherous. In the days of sail, the prevailing westerly winds of the ‘Roaring Forties’ provided good passage, but any shift to the south-east meant trouble as ships could be swept ashore. Gale force winds of over 40 knots occur year round in the area, but especially in October when the tide changes twice daily and runs at three knots. Gale force winds of over 40 knots occur year round in the area, but especially in October when the tide changes twice daily and runs at three knots. Shipping conditions were especially difficult for ships that foundered when transferring cargo. Three ships earning this coastline the famous name of the ‘shipwreck’ road.

Lorne, 140 kilometres from Melbourne, is a favoured, fashionable all year tourist destination where the forest meets the sea. The moderate climate is due to the surrounding hills that provide good shelter from the prevailing winds of Bass Strait. The nomadic Gadubanud tribe have been the traditional owners of this land for over 40,000 years.

By 1970, with land pricing soaring, many guesthouses gave way to motels. Bushfires always threaten and major loss occurred here in 1983 on Ash Wednesday, when three people died and 782 buildings were lost in this region.

The annual 1.2 kilometre-long Lorne Pier to Pub swim started in 1981 and now attracts thousands of visitors. The beauty and surrounding areas, with more than 10 waterfalls in 10km, have inspired poets and writers, including Rudyard Kipling. After more than 150 years of European settlement, Lorne retains its charm.

The view from the Big Hill plaque offers the first view of Lorne in the distance. This car park is large.
the road along this rugged section has been closed many
times due to landslide, flood and fire. in 1971, a serious
landslide at Windy Point, 600 metres east of Sheoak
River, closed the road for over five months. Along this
section, an unstable rock mass threatened to collapse the
road into the sea. In a major engineering feat, 45 steel
cable anchors secured the shifting mountain face to the
underlying bedrock. These anchors are clearly visible today.
VicRoads continues to monitor the road for movement and
assiduously maintains the Great Ocean Road.

the Cumberland River is one of the most beautiful river
valleys along the road. Reminiscent of its namesake in
England, the area is a pristine wilderness with a catchment
of 3,750 hectares. The camping ground, originally a work
camp, was opened to the public in the early 1930s with the
first amenities built in 1934. The site, managed by the then
Lorne Foreshore Committee, expanded in the 1960s with
Rangers onsite and private operators from 1997.

CONSTRUCTION AND ENGINEERING
OF THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD

The Great Ocean Road is an engineering marvel. Built over
hostile terrain before the advent of sophisticated machinery.
“The Great Ocean Road will stand as a monument to
persistent, self-sacrificing effort. It is a highway made as
a fitting memorial to the deeds of our soldiers” Howard
Hitchcock, The Herald, 3 January 1931.
The section between Lorne and Cape Patton was the last
to be completed. Work started in earnest in 1922 after
initial attempts in 1919. Men were lowered on ropes from
the hill tops to dig footholds from which a track was dug
and then widened into a roadway. Substantial sections of
the cliff side were blasted with dynamite, cleared, packed,
reinforced and graded using only manual labour and horse-
drawn scoops. Thirty-six rivers and creeks were bridged or
forded.
Despite working from both ends of this section, it was not
until 1924 that Cumberland River was publicly accessible
from Lorne. By 1932 the last section of the Great Ocean
Road was completed near Mt Defiance. The section of road
from Apollo Bay to Lorne was fully sealed in 1965.
The plaque is about 250 metres to the left after crossing the bridge on the main beach carpark and overlooked by the hotel on the opposite side of the road.

Wye River was first settled in 1882. It was then abandoned for a time before being resettled for farming in 1895. The timber industry was active in the Otways from 1850 until 2008. Major centres were at Apollo Bay, Lorne, Wye River, Kennett River and inland at Beech Forest. Railways opened up the region for timber transport to Colac from Forrest in 1891, from Beech Forest in 1902 and to just south of Lavers Hill by 1911. Additionally, a 240-kilometre network of wooden tramlines supplied timber to over 250 mills in the region until the 1950s, when road transport became more efficient. Some of these tramline routes are used today as walking and cycling tracks.

In 1900, the State Government encouraged timber harvesting, with selected logging occurring over the next 80 years. The southern area of the main Otway ridge was heavily logged, resulting in the loss of the huge mountain ash, messmates and backwoods. The northern side survived better, as it was drier with smaller trees. Eucalypts replaced many logged areas, which left a reduced canopy and a drier, damaged ground environment.

Softwood plantations started in the 1920s were by the 1970s dominated with radiata pine. Wood chipping, for paper making, commenced in 1956 and continued for 50 years. In the 1960s clear-fell logging caused major damage and over 95% of the ancient ferns in the area were destroyed or burnt. Public concern led to the formation of the Otway National Park in 1981 and a ban on logging in the East Barham river water catchment by 1986. This area was eventually incorporated in 2005 into the 103,000 hectare Great Otway National Park and the timber industry departed in 2008.
King Island is 98 kilometres to the south, and through the narrow passage between the King Island Reef and Australia’s mainland, thousands of ships plied their cargo to Victoria. This sea is treacherous, as winds and currents are variable and the shallow, 80-metre average depth of Bass Strait made it a graveyard for ships.

There have been 55 shipwrecks between Cape Otway and Point Lonsdale since 1853. The Cape Otway Light Station made passage safer from 1848, but storms and human error have always dogged the region. The most serious wrecks occurred in the 19th century, some with loss of life. Rescues were made by brave local men in small boats or by rocket-firing equipment, but frequently, survival depended on individual luck and initiative.

The remnants of the large steel-hulled barque Speculant, wrecked in 1911, sit on the rocks below the Cape Patton lookout. In 1940, the 5883-tonne MS City of Rayville hit a German sea mine off Cape Otway and was the first American ship sunk during World War Two.

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Apollo Bay, in the foothills of the Otways, is a favourite stopping point for many tourists on the Great Ocean Road. The picturesque town offers a range of accommodation, many shops, a beautiful beach and a mariner. The first settlement at Apollo Bay was established by wood cutters in the 1850s. Before this, sealers and whalers used the bay during the whaling season. The settlement flourished as the centre of a small timber industry supporting over 1,000 people. Pit-sawn timber was dragged to the beach then floated 100 metres through the breakers to ships bound for Geelong. Onshore winds often made loading hazardous and numerous ships were washed ashore or sunk. In the 1860s the population declined as the timber industry slowed. An infrequent stagecoach service carrying mail had started by 1871, despite the primitive roads through the mountains. Even by 1932 it took six hours to travel the 30 kilometres uphill on an unsealed road to Beech Forest. Land sales started in 1877, followed by the establishment of the first school in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. A new dairy industry in the 1890s brought more people; a reliable income and a butter factory in 1904. Tourism blossomed in 1880. 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The plaque is located on a long straight section of roadway 24km from Melba Gully and 4km before you reach the turn off to Princetown. From here there are lovely views over the town and river mouth.

**JOSEPH GELLIBRAND PLAQUE**

Joseph Gellibrand was the first Attorney General of Tasmania in 1823, a mastermind of Victoria’s settlement, a barrister, farmer and explorer. He farmed extensively, had a successful private law practice and established the colony’s first bank. In 1833 he had Australia’s first personal life insurance policy. Always an adventurer, Gellibrand wrote the Deed document used by Batman in 1836 to secure land rights from the local Aboriginal population around Melbourne.

In 1836, he brought a sheep herd from Tasmania to Melbourne via Frankston and then explored towards Geelong and Gisborne. A year later he returned to explore west of Geelong and then vanished in the Otways.

Although his amazing life was cut short, Gellibrand is remembered through his name being given to three towns, a river, plus many other geographical features and a Federal Government electorate. His descendants were to influence many aspects of Australia’s history.

**PRINCIETOWN**

Princetown is a small township at the mouth of the Gellibrand River. The river rises near Beech Forest with a 1,200 square kilometre catchment and meanders across flood plains to the sea. The river is a major source of urban water for Warrnambool, Colac and many Western District townships.

By 1876, Princetown (named after Queen Victoria’s son Prince Alfred) had a number of guesthouses. Visitors would arrive here from the Timboon rail terminus seeking a remote coastal experience.

The Gellibrand River was a vital means of commercial transport for local farms. Princetown provided safe storage facilities before produce was taken by cart to Port Campbell and then shipped to Melbourne. Upstream was once the Lower Gellibrand Butter Factory, which processed milk from the outlying dairy farms. The strategic importance of the township diminished with the opening of the Great Ocean Road, despite the road here not being sealed until 1984.

Today the small town offers beautiful views across the estuary and Bass Strait. The sandbar at the river mouth restricts boat access and because of a diminishing fresh water flow, sea water increasingly permeates the upper reaches.

It is believed that in 1837 Joseph Gellibrand was buried in the foothills just east of Princetown by local Aborigines.

Carpark sign-posted on left. Can also be reached on foot via a well-marked 2.4 km path from the Twelve Apostles Car Park as part of the Great Ocean Walk.

The original steps were carved into the cliff face by local farmer Hugh Gibson in the 19th century and followed a route known to local Aborigines. Now the 86 steps down onto the beach provide a unique access to a spectacular wild shore line and the two towering 70 metre high lime stone stacks called Gog & Magog. Although not part of the 12 Apostles (which are around the next headland) Gog & Magog impress as they tower above you and the light plays on their various external stone faces.

Be wary of ocean conditions, particularly high tides and obey safety instructions.
This is the highlight of the Great Ocean Road and the most photographed natural feature in Australia. Car parking signage is large and indicates where to make a right hand turn off the Great Ocean Road. Here is the Parks Victoria visitor centre at the Twelve Apostles, comprising an orientation area, interpretation displays along the boardwalk, toilets and a large carpark that accommodates cars and coaches. Access to the viewing areas is via a tunnel under the Great Ocean Road. From here various short walks allow cliff top views of this natural marvel.

When first seen by settlers there were thirteen ‘Apostles’, but with the constant pounding of the ocean only eight Apostles remain, though it was only in 2005 that the ninth crashed into the sea. Some of them are obscured by the headland and other rock stacks, leaving many tourists wondering just how many Apostles there actually are. The arch of nearby Island Archway collapsed in 2009 and now presents as two unconnected pillars. They have been officially named Tom and Eva after the sole survivors of the nearby Loch Ard shipwreck.

The stacks are sedimentary rock composed of vertically-jointed and flat bedded limestone (seashells and sand compressed for millions of years) that rise in some cases to 50 metres high. It is estimated that it takes about 600 years for the headland to be eroded by the elements into an arch, then two stacks, which will inevitably collapse. This coastline is renowned as one of the fastest eroding coastlines in the world.

The breathtaking site of the Twelve Apostles leaves the visitor with a lifetime memory and, because of the forever changing weather and sea patterns, every visit is different. The colossal force of the ocean combined with the power of the winds leave us with the sense of our own vulnerability in the face of the unpredictable elements.

Loch Ard Gorge is a must-visit site, as it was here in 1878 that one of Australia’s saddest maritime tragedies occurred. The road into the carpark has various vantage points, such as the Blow Hole (200 metres) and Thunder Cave (550 metres) and information boards that tell the story. There are three self-guided walks, including one that descends into the gorge to gain some idea of what confronted the survivors on that disastrous night. Visit the small cemetery and walk towards Mutton Bird Island looking out to where the ship sank.

The clipper Loch Ard, coming from England with 54 people, ran aground here and all except two people perished. The ship hit a submerged reef off the tip of Mutton Bird Island and sank quickly. The two 18-year-old, exhausted survivors were flung into the churning sea and drifted into the beach at the gorge. The 90-metre sides of the gorge were scaled by Tom Price, who soon brought help from a nearby farm to save Eva Carmichael.
The local Aborigines originally called Port Campbell Purroitchhoorong, meaning 'the spirit voice that mocks you', reputedly referring to the echo issuing from the headland's sea caverns. The town was later named after a local whaling captain.

European settlement began in the 1840s, but the town remained isolated until a rough road was constructed in 1866. The town was surveyed in 1875, with public land auctions in 1878. The population of 138 hardy citizens built a post office in 1874, connected the telegraph by 1886 and the telephone in 1909.

Fronting the treacherous Southern Ocean, the surrounding spectacular limestone cliffs made the bay a relatively safe haven from storms. A 40-metre T-shaped jetty was built in 1878 to aid access for sea rescue and salvage following the sea wreck of the Loch Ard. The jetty provided a landing for the transport of goods and produce to and from this isolated area.

In 1892, the state railway line ended 17 kilometres away at the town of Timboon, which prospered at the expense of Port Campbell. However, tourism revitalised growth in the early 1900s, with holiday-makers coming by train and later horse-drawn coach to the six guesthouses and the beach. For regional farmers, the beach was a relaxing refuge from the endless toil of work and brutal summer heat.

Hardships of the 1930s Great Depression were eased by local employment on the Great Ocean Road between Princetown and Peterborough. This final section of the Great Ocean Road was opened at Port Campbell in December 1935, but due to cavern undermining and the risk of collapse, the town’s headland section was diverted and closed in 2003.

In 1964, large tracts of the coastline were incorporated and protected in the Port Campbell National Park (Princetown to Peterborough – 1830 hectares) and the adjacent Bay of Islands Coastal Park (950 hectares).

The Great Ocean Road continues to inject new life into Port Campbell as a tourist destination.
The last contact the Great Ocean Road makes with the sea is near here at the Bay of Islands, where wonderful views of over a dozen sandstone stacks and swirling surf abound. The ocean views and geological features are memorable and with fewer tourists visiting (when compared with the Twelve Apostles) it is a must-see destination.

The road from Peterborough heads principally inland and through flat dairy country to Allansford, which is the official end of the Great Ocean Road. Warrnambool is only 18 km west. Melbourne from Allansford is 247 km/3 hours’ drive on the inland route through Colac, alternatively 348 km/5 hours driving back along the Great Ocean Road.

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EDUCATIONAL WEB PAGES

- Tourism Victoria - www.visitvictoria.com/Regions/Great-Ocean-Road
- Australian Bronze Commemorative Plaques - www.plaques.satlink.com.au

Thanks is extended to the many private citizens who donated money to individual plaques as their generosity ensured the completion of the project. They are acknowledge by name on their plaque.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ross Bastiaan AM RFD is a Melbourne periodontist. He initiated the Great Ocean Road plaques project in 2003 and for the next 14 years researched and hand sculpted all the large bronze plaques along the GOR. His plaques are done on a voluntary, not-for-profit bases and are well known around the world with in excess of 270 bronze interpretive plaques located in more than 20 countries. Most of Ross Bastiaan’s works are seen on Australia’s battlefields and including Gallipoli, his first in 1990 and later the Western Front in Belgium and France. In Asia there are more but best known are those along the Kokoda Trail (PNG), Borneo and Thailand. In Australia his bronzes can be seen along the Burke & Wills route, Kokoda Walks in four states and in most capital cities. He has written two other guide books.