

CAPE CONVERSATIONS

Cape Paterson Residents and Ratepayers Association Newsletter – April 2026



History of Our Rockpool – Mike Tesch

It seems the Cape Paterson rock pool is the only man-made ocean swimming pool in Victoria. The rock pool was the brainchild of Alan Birt and Jack Cargill. Alan wanted a calmer swimming place for younger children. There was already a natural channel between the bay and a small rockpool. The existing small rockpool was also warmer in winter than the bay. So this was the site he chose.

From 1956 to 1963, with help from a local farmer (Ron Bolding, who owned the tractor), a young Frank Liddle and Jack Cargill (a Wonthaggi hairdresser), excavated the larger rockpool. Regrettably the names of many other regular volunteers haven't been recorded. The gelignite was "donated" by the Wonthaggi State Coal Mine, as were the iron slip rails. This allowed the coal skips to take out the rock materials, and this was dumped into Browns Bay (to the west).



Photos courtesy of Wonthaggi & District Historical Society

Hand-wound "gut buster" drills were used to make holes in the rock. The holes were then filled with explosives (sticks of gelignite), as Alan was highly experienced with explosives. After each blast the rocks were removed by wheelbarrows and the coal skips. Three hundred tonnes of rock was removed. No permits existed; there was no financial reward. The £35 donations collected (worth about \$1,200 today) were never used.

The local Italians and Greeks did most of the concreting. The three tonnes of cement was donated by Melbourne visitors. It took a staggering seven years to build because tides restricted work to one Sunday a fortnight, and this was further hampered by weather conditions.

2026 Diary Dates

Committee Meetings

13 June
8 August
10 October
21 November

Working Bees

May and June - cancelled

11 July
8 August
12 September
10 October
14 November

Parents' Group

5 June
3 July
7 August
4 September
2 October
6 November
4 December

Thank you

Thanks to Mike Tesch for collating the rockpool information, Graeme Birt, Anne Gilmour (nee Birt), Rodney Little, Stuart and Ron Gilmour, Danny Carr, Mark, George and Joan Scott, Terri Allen, Nola Thorpe, Faye Quilford and Irene Williams at the Wonthaggi & District Historical Society.

History of Our Rockpool – continued

Annie Gilmour and Alan Birt taught hundreds of local children to swim in the pool during the post-war "how to swim" campaign. Alan received a medal from Queen Elizabeth II for teaching so many children to swim.

Two laps of the pool got you the "Herald" certificate. When you could swim across to the 50 metre boy you got the "Junior" certificate. With both certificates you became a qualified lifesaver.

High tides now regularly flush out the pool, occasionally trapping fish and even small sharks. They are trapped there until the next high tide releases them.



The pool was built by local people, with no government help. There was mutual distrust and suspicion between the two, possibly left over from the 1930 miners' strikes. Not only didn't the miners ask permission - they didn't ask for forgiveness. The Wonthaggi mine closed on 21 December 1968 but the "can do" attitude can still be seen today. Many other mining towns died when the local mine closed. Wonthaggi not only survived - it grew to become the thriving town we all love today. As for the rock pool, local kids still learn how to swim and snorkel in it.



Extracts from Bass Coast Post 15/4/2026

Cape Snippets ...

Traffic Camera and Counters

The Department of Transport and Planning replied to us regarding the traffic counters on the Wonthaggi Road. They wrote: *The counters were scheduled to remain in place for approximately two weeks while data was collected, to help us understand traffic patterns and volumes, which supports the ongoing management of Victoria's road network.*

Membership

Currently our 326 members live in 194 households: 146 members are permanent, 175 stay in holiday houses and five are connected to the community. The Gold medal goes to Coral St with 23 members, Silver to Nardoo St with 21 members and Bronze to Tarooch St with 19 members with 32 members are from the eco village.

Budget

Following feedback from members at the AGM we're creating a budget around the broad areas of biodiversity, planning and infrastructure, wellbeing, communication and administration. If you have thoughts on what is important to you - please let us know at membership@capepaterson.asn.au.

We can't promise anything, but welcome input from members.

Container Deposit Scheme

We are on track to break last year's amount of \$183.30. The money received contributes to our Parents' Group, so please drop off cans and bottles to the depot in Wonthaggi. No amount is too small, and our card is on the wall.

The Shaggy Dog and the Gelignite!

Continuing our Rockpool feature, everyone likes a shaggy dog story - but Cape Paterson's rockpool boasts a ripper. Early in its construction, Alan Birt explained that he needed to blast out a particularly large piece of the rock platform. He connected an extra-long fuse and ordered the workers and onlookers to move 250 metres away - near the position of the present toilet block. The fuse was lit. Only then did the owner of the kiosk, Attilio Storti, notice that his dog Fido was standing on the rock about to be blasted. Attilio became hysterical and had to be held back. **BOOM**

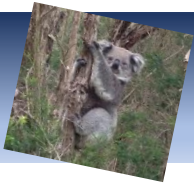
The rock was blasted into the air sending pieces of shrapnel as far as the onlookers. But more miraculously, the huge rock sailed through the air with Fido on top and landed in the bay. To everyone's amazement, and Attilio's delight, Fido was unharmed and swam ashore. When I spoke to locals who were present at the pool's construction, I was repeatedly asked if I'd heard about the dog. A true story! - MikeTesch

Extracts from Bass Coast Post 15/4/2026

Review of CPRRA Strategic Plan

Given that we have passed the halfway mark of the current Strategic Plan period the Committee has undertaken a review.

It was pleasing to mark complete on the northern development goals as well as several other items. Some dates have been adjusted to reflect the ongoing nature of the goals. Some items were identified as no longer relevant. The updated Plan is available on our website.



Biodiversity

— protecting and conserving our environment

March Rockpool Education and Working Bee

The March working bee was well attended with 18 people pulling weeds and restoring space around our plantings from the last two years at the top of the Boat Ramp.

Afterward we went down to the rock pool where Mike Tesch regaled us with stories of the construction of the pool. It was gratifying to see the interest this talk had generated and that amongst nearly 40 attending the talk, there were a couple of the original pool builders and their descendants present.



Hard at work at the top of the Boat Ramp



Our storyteller Mike Tesch



Interested attendees

April Spurge Removal

The postponed April working bee near the mouth of the Powlett River was done in association with the Gippsland Threatened Species Action Group. Six of our members from Cape Paterson joined enthusiasts from as far away as Inverloch in perfect weather conditions.

This working bee involved pulling heavy infestations of sea spurge to help restore Hooded Plover habitat in an area where the hoodies are only just hanging on. We were able to clear about 200 metres of low-lying foreshore habitat.

Due to working bee organisers being away for the next two months, our next working bee will be Saturday 11 July when we'll be planting in the area where we've removed boneseed west of CPSLSC.



Volunteers removing the dreaded sea spurge

Weed Watch – Invasive Weeds a National Problem

Nurseries can still legally sell plants that invade our farmlands, urban landscapes and coastal/nature reserves. Why is this important? Invasive weeds reduce biodiversity and make life more difficult for our furry and feathered friends by reducing indigenous habitats. The ABC has recently published this article if you want to find out more.



<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-04-17/invasive-plants-in-australian-homes-damaging-gardens-environment/106492040>

Before buying plants from nurseries or well-meaning local stalls, please refer to the following website on what constitutes an invasive weed.

[BCSC Common Weeds ID Booklet 2015 Web.pdf](#)

Hoodie News

Volunteers met staff from Birdlife Australia, Parks Victoria, Phillip Island Nature Park and BCSC at the end of season debrief recently. Overall, it was a good year, and there is no doubt that our community understands how endangered these birds have become.

Some interesting Bass Coast statistics (from San Remo to Inverloch) showed that we had 31 breeding pairs – the second highest density in Victoria. This was attributed in part to the early enclosure of nests, creating a refuge for the breeding birds.

There were 60 nests, 155 eggs and 44 chicks, of which 16 fledged. Cape Paterson can be proud of our three fledglings from F break to Undertow Bay.

While all volunteers have shown a fantastic effort, special thanks to two of our members – Helen Tennant and Kerry Williamson – for their unwavering vigilance in what can be a roller coaster of emotions.

So, it's time to pack up all the signs and ropes and take a well-earned break until September when the breeding season commences.