



Campsite approved

Council offers Greenrise Lake as free site for Penola visitors

J.L. "FRED" SMITH

VISITORS to Penola can now use Greenrise Lake as a free camping area under a move by Wattle Range Council aimed at boosting tourism.

The council voted last week to allow free camping for users of self-contained vehicles for a maximum of two nights at designated locations in Penola, Kalangadoo, Tantanoola and Nangula.

As part of the free camping policy, signs will be placed by council at the four locations clarifying the types of motorhomes and self-contained vehicles allowed.

Council will also place signs to promote the nearest caravan parks and place donation boxes at each of the free camping sites.

Mayor Peter Gandolfi said the sites were carefully selected to ensure they do not detract from caravan parks.

"The designated areas for overnight stays have been placed outside of the towns which have caravan parks," Mr Gandolfi said.

"Council has created these areas because we do not want to miss out on the tourist traffic."

He said people with motorhomes will use the petrol stations, cafes and other facilities in the town.

"In essence, current legislation already allows 'free camping' as people are allowed to pull over their vehicles for 24 hours as long as they are not a traffic hazard or breaching any time regulations," Mr Gandolfi said.

"Council wants to promote overnight stays and put some governance in place rather than the 'ad hoc' arrangements at present."

FREE MOTORHOME SITES (MAXIMUM STAY OF TWO NIGHTS)

- Princes Highway parking bay, Nangula
- Tantanoola railway parklands
- Greenrise Lake, Penola
- Kalangadoo railway parklands

Penola Caravan Park proprietor Henk Bruins said although he was not pleased with council's decision to allow free camping at Greenrise,

he was not "up in arms about it".

"As the proprietor of a caravan park, I'm not happy about it because it could have a serious economic impact on us," he said.

"Even four or five vans a night could be detrimental.

"I can't imagine why council would want to do it and it is the caravan park owners who will suffer the loss.

"I have no problem with free camping areas, just not next door to a caravan park like Greenrise is."



Back to basics in great outdoors



Scott Podmore has a look at an industry that has stood the test of time and is booming in our backyard

AT A farewell party for my friend on the eve of his year-long family caravanning adventure, I asked him whether he was concerned about taking his boys out of primary school for a year and hitting the road for a lap of Australia.

"Absolutely not," he said. "They'll learn more in the coming year than they will in the next five at primary school."

Two weeks later while watching the news on TV, there they were, the entire family knee-deep in the ocean somewhere along the east coast helping to save a beached humpback whale.

It was a goosebumps kind of moment for me; something much more profound for them.

Another Aussie family who recently packed their life into a caravan for a year and hit the road are Nikki Harris and Matt Allan and their four children.

Choosing to explore their "own backyard" rather than overseas was an easy decision, Nikki says.

"We felt a road trip holiday around Australia was easier and safer," Nikki says. "We allowed 12 months of travel on the same budget that would have achieved for us a quarter of the time overseas."

"For us, the experience was as much about the length of time together as a family as the destinations we took in. We definitely followed the old adage: It's the journey, not the destination. We wanted our kids to know their own country."

"Matt's father had planned to do the trip when he retired years earlier and died prior to doing it. That was a big motivator for us to seize the day."

Seize the day, indeed, and the "Harris-Allans" are just one of a significantly growing number of families choosing the caravanning and camping lifestyle, according to Australian Tourism Research findings.

The ATR research found the largest consumer group in the industry is made up of 35 to 49-

year-olds, who account for about 50 per cent of all travel in the sector. That figure is further backed by the Alliance Strategic Research finding that the key current user group was 35 to 49-year-olds, particularly families with children.

"It's about escapism, getting back to basics and family values," says Stuart Lamont, chief executive officer of the Caravan Industry Association of Australia.

Caravanning and camping has always stood the test of time and economic challenges, but now it's surging.

"We're time poor and this type of holiday experience gives us the opportunity to discover more of our beautiful country and get our hands dirty," Lamont says. "It's affordable. You take your family away to Disneyland or Bali and you come back home with a credit card debt. You choose to go caravanning, and you have an asset to either resell or re-use."

Affordability aside, it's the non-material aspect that stays with you as a caravanner or



camper, good and bad alike.

“Some of my fondest memories as a kid were some of the disasters at the time, too. It’s that genuine, warts-and-all experience that can also make it so special,” Lamont says. “You know, going caravanning or camping and it’s pouring, you’re waterlogged and you think at the time ‘I’m never doing this again’, but they’re the memories you have that you look at most fondly. They’re bonding moments, lasting memories.”

The stigma of grey nomads dominating the travel sector is gone as families continue to hit the road. “The serious growth in the registrations is the family van range,” Lamont explains.

The CIAA boss suggests another reason why it’s boom time is simply due to the fact the type of holiday experience is “built into our culture”.

“If you look back in time, a large percentage of the population of Australia has gone caravanning and or camping some time in their life, and many childhood memories are built on going away to stay in a park, in a caravan or on a riverbank somewhere with their family.

“For mums and dads, it’s about instilling in their children some of those hardcore values they learnt, and this is an inexpensive way of re-creating those memories and passing on a legacy to the next generation.”

In fact, the boom goes beyond the family market. While the typically popular grey nomad sector remains strong, “gramping” is the emerging trend as well as an increase in Asian visitor numbers.

“That inter-generational ‘gramping’ trend is certainly growing,” Lamont says. “Grandparents are taking the opportunity to take their grandchildren on holiday. There’s also a real opportunity now in the international market

with Chinese visitors as we see them rapidly becoming our No.1 inbound.”

Dennis Werthenbach,

SITE FOR SORE EYES: (clockwise from main) Watsons Beach, Yorke Peninsula, SA; Berrara Beach Holiday Chalets in NSW; camping in Murray River National Park, Katarapko, SA; family holidays on the Clyde River Nelligen. NSW South Coast; and a visitor hops in at the chalets.

chairman of Family Parks (one of the big caravan park chains along with others like BIG4 and Top Tourist Parks) says he believes the appeal is a lot to do with the “quality and value” being offered by most parks throughout Australia.

“I’m enormously impressed with the improvements and value offered for everything from the larger resort-style parks – with eateries, bars, water parks, jumping pillows and so on – through to our smaller and more humble locations with tranquil settings, near lakes, rivers and beaches,” Werthenbach says.

“The value is really important, whether you have a tent, caravan or hire out a cabin. It’s terrific value. Throw in the fact we have fantastic Australian-made recreational vehicles and products, and a serious manufacturing work force, and everybody wins.”

Caravanning and camping has always been a big industry in Australia. But it’s now accounting for a staggering \$7 billion of annual expenditure.

Caravan registrations have experienced a higher rate of increase than any other vehicle type in the past two years and research into the number of registered RVs or motorhomes in Australia shows a jump year-on-year of 5 per cent.

In 2013, the number of registered RVs in Australia was 528,869, up from 502,025 the previous year.

Of those, 474,783 are towed product while more than 54,000 are motorhomes or campervans.

Lamont believes the love affair Australians have with caravanning and camping isn’t about to finish any time soon.

“I love my job because I get to go around Australia, but once upon a time I could never understand why people would choose to do the great lap around Australia six or seven times or go back to the same place over and over,” Lamont says.

“Part of that is habit and routine, but you can go to the same place at a different time or be in a park with a different neighbour, different weather conditions and you get a very different experience.

“It’s a really healthy time for caravanning and camping. The growth in the broader market is always going to be about what people desire – the creature comforts away from home, the raw experience of getting your hands dirty in the outdoors. People are craving that.”

More: experiencecaravanningandcamping.com.au





POPULARITY OF PARK LIFE

- There are more than 528,000 registered RV vehicles in Australia.
- This is the fastest growing vehicle type by registration.
- 85 per cent of Australians have stayed in a caravan holiday park at least once in their life.
- Over 67 million site nights were spent in the caravanning and camping sector annually in 2012.
- 90 per cent of all caravanners and campers in Australia are domestic.
- Expenditure by caravanners and campers is \$7 billion annually.