

## 13. Visitor impact and management solutions at Port Campbell National Park

### Aim

This activity provides an opportunity for students to consider and discuss the extent to which activities undertaken in the Park effect its environment.

### Materials

- Table: Human activities and their effect on Port Campbell National Park.
- Resource sheet 13a: Visitor use and issues at Port Campbell National Park.
- Resource sheet 13b: Management of major visitor sites in the park.

### Activities

1. Read the information in the Resource sheets to help you complete the table below.
2. For each of the activities listed note down in column two where they occur, or mainly occur.
3. Note the environmental concerns that this activity raises, including any concerns of your own. Add these to column 3.

4. Discuss in small groups possible management strategies that could minimise this impact. Write these down in column four.

Referring to your completed table:

5. Which three activities are likely to have the highest impact on the environment?
6. Which three activities are likely to have the lowest impact on the environment?
7. Choose one of the activities that have a high impact at Port Campbell. Suggest a program to inform people of the implications of their actions. Remember to clearly identify your audience. Consider a mix of strategies – education/ awareness raising, incentives and penalties in your campaign.

#### Links to Section 2

See also Section 2 of this education resource kit, in particular:  
Parks and Science  
9. Management issues in parks.  
28. Visitor impact and management strategies.

**Table: Human activities and their effect on Port Campbell National Park**

Activity	Location	Environmental concerns	Possible management solutions
Caravanning / camping			
Waking			
Picnicking			
Cycling			
Bush camping			
Fishing			
Swimming / surfing			
Diving			
Boating			
Aircraft flights			

## 13a. Visitor use and issues at Port Campbell National Park

### Scenic viewing

Scenic viewing is the most popular activity for visitors to the park. Vehicle access to areas of high scenic quality such as the Twelve Apostles, Loch Ard Gorge, London Bridge and Castle Rock carry over 100,000 cars per year.

*Potential* management issues are:

- Impact of car parks and walking tracks on the coastal environment (e.g. drainage and trampling about car parks could lead to environmental problems, including erosion and a reduction in soil stability).
- Location of car parks, roads and other visitor facilities can impact on the scenic quality of the landscape.
- Cost of road maintenance.

### Picnicking

Picnic facilities in the area are generally simple and concentrated within the boundaries of the townships, mostly near food outlets. Some visitors have lunch in the car parks at viewing sites or at Glenample Homestead. Others take a picnic to the beach at places such as Loch Ard.

*Potential* management issues are:

- In the peak season most lookouts and car parks are already very overcrowded so providing picnic facilities could worsen this problem.
- Picnic facilities and toilet facilities could detract from the scenic quality of the landscape.
- Litter left behind by visitors is unsightly, can create problems for people and wildlife, and can encourage weeds or non-native plants to grow.

### Walking

Walking is a very popular way for visitors to explore and enjoy the park. The tracks at major visitor sites link car parks to lookouts or steps. The 2.5 km Discovery Walk, linking the Port Campbell caravan park and the Two Mile Bay Access Road, is the main track provided for walkers in the park.

*Potential* management issues are:

- If carefully managed, walking has little impact on park values. Erosion problems can occur if people walk off track.

### Camping and caravanning

Many cyclists and some motorists travel along the Great Ocean Road and seek bush campsites, but there are few suitable bush campsites so bush camping is not permitted in the park.

The Port Campbell and Peterborough Caravan Parks and the Princetown Recreation Reserve are the main caravanning and camping sites in or near the park. The caravan parks are not managed by Parks Victoria. The caravan parks are usually full during the Christmas and Easter holidays. Outside these periods occupancy rates are generally low to very low.

*Potential* management issues are:

- Campgrounds require the provision of, at the very least, suitable toilet facilities and sewerage treatment.
- Land within the park is limited.

### Dogs

Dogs are not permitted in Port Campbell National Park because of the disturbance or injury they can cause to other visitors or wildlife.

## Fishing

Fishing is a traditional activity for many families in the region. It is also an important activity for many visitors holidaying in the Port Campbell area.

Coastal fishing usually occurs when the weather is warm, seas are relatively calm and tide conditions are suitable. Fishing is mostly by rod and reel, although pots and spear guns are used along the sea coast. Boat anglers often use hoop nets. Some illegal fishing, including abalone and crayfish fishing, occurs in the park.

A range of clifftops, beaches, rockshelves and streambanks are used as fishing sites. In exceptionally calm conditions, fishing also occurs from boats, mostly off Port Campbell and Newfield Bays.

*Potential* management issues are:

- People cutting new tracks to get to fishing sites can create erosion problems.

## Swimming, surfing and beach activities

Most of the swimming in Port Campbell National Park usually occurs only when conditions are warm to hot and relatively calm, in other words, on relatively few days of the year. When these conditions occur during the school holidays, most attractive beaches along the southwest are crowded.

Most family group groups swim and paddle in Port Campbell Creek, Curdies Inlet and Sherbrook River estuaries. Ocean swimming occurs mostly at Port Campbell beach and to a lesser extent at Loch Ard Gorge. Other beaches used for swimming in calm weather include Clifton, Gibsons Steps, Two Mile Bay and Newfield Bay.

Opportunities for surfboard riding off the Port Campbell coastline are important to a small number of locals and itinerant board riders. Most surfboard riding of the national park occurs in summer and autumn.

*Potential* management issues are:

- Visitor safety can be a concern. Ocean water along this coast are cold and can be extremely dangerous under certain weather conditions. Also, when beaches and waters are crowded, there is a potential for injury between swimmers, boaters, surfers and divers.
- Dogs brought into the park by visitors can impact on wildlife.

## Diving

The shore platforms, reefs and shipwrecks off Port Campbell coastline are of considerable interest to divers. However the very dangerous seas and uncertain weather conditions greatly restrict periods of diving.

Most scuba diving is done from the shoreline at Port Campbell and Loch Ard Gorge. In calm weather other accessible sites close to offshore reefs are used, particularly Two Mile Bay and Ten Chain Reef. Many groups use small boats launched by a crane at Port Campbell jetty or from boat ramps at Peterborough or Boat Bay in Bay of Islands Coastal Park, to reach offshore reefs and the Loch Ard and Schomberg shipwrecks.

*Potential* management issues are:

- Visitor safety and crowding issues.
- Lack of facilities to wash down boats or fill air tanks (use of compressors in the caravan park is not permitted as noise can annoy other visitors).
- Illegal spear fishing.



Swimming ©MT

## Boating

Port Campbell is a minor port for boats. Most boats are operated by members of the Port Campbell Boat Club or the Port Campbell Fishermens Association. A few boats are operated by visitors and scuba diving groups.

Small boating off the Port Campbell coastline is hazardous on most days of the year, due to onshore currents, the exposed inhospitable coastline, and changeable weather.

*Potential* management issues are:

- Visitor safety.

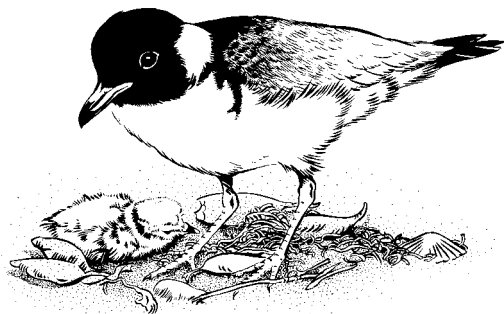
## Aircraft

Over recent years there has been an increase in the number of low-flying, sight-seeing helicopter flights over the park. These flights originate on properties outside the park and are not subject to direct control by the park rangers. They are a popular activity for visitors to the park.

A new Flying Agreement has been developed to restrict flying times over key visitor sites within the park, and specifies a minimum of 500 feet above ground level.

*Potential* management issues:

- The noise and visual intrusion of these flights can reduce the quality of other visitors' experiences
- The noise of these flights can adversely affect wildlife such as penguin colonies.



Hooded Plover ©MT

## Horse riding

Only a relatively small amount of horse riding occurs in the park. Occasional horse riding groups use the park.

*Potential* management issues are:

- Under certain conditions, horse riding can compact soils and trample vegetation, creating erosion.
- Horses can spread weeds into the park.
- The level of horse riding close to the townships is likely to increase if there is any substantial expansion of rural residential development in or near the towns.

## Visitor information

In 1994 information boards were installed at the Princetown and Peterborough entrances to the park to provide initial information to park visitors.

The Visitor Information Centre is located in Port Campbell township. The Centre provides a 12 minute video and a series of displays. They cover themes including coastal processes, shipwreck history, plants and animals of the park and park management. These are used in particular by visiting school groups, by tourists who have insufficient time to explore the whole Park, and by those visitors arriving in bad weather.

Holiday activity programs have been concentrated in the park during Christmas and Easter school holidays.

The Port Campbell National Park Visitor Information Guide (Parknote) advises visitors about facilities and recreation opportunities at the park. This leaflet provides pre-visit information to visitors so that they know there is no camping within the park and that dogs are not allowed in the national park.

## 13b. Management of major visitor sites in the park

There are nine main visitor sites in Port Campbell National Park. This resource sheet summarises the features, facilities and management issues for each of these locations.

### TWELVE APOSTLES

The Twelve Apostles is one of few landmarks recognised as 'Victorian' by residents of other States. Visitor numbers at this site exceeds those at any site in the park, with the exception of Port Campbell township.

The site has an impressive series of offshore limestone rockstacks known as the Twelve Apostles. Only nine of these can be seen from lookouts.

A boardwalk and viewing platform was constructed in 1988 to enable visitors to gain an excellent view of the rock stacks. The areas around the walking tracks and boardwalk have been revegetated.

In 2001, a new carpark was constructed across the road from the Twelve Apostles Lookout to replace the former carpark. This will aid in protecting the park by reducing the immediate pressure of cars and buses. There is now a footpath through to the viewing area via a tunnel under the Great Ocean Road.

The Port Campbell National Park management plan aims to maintain facilities for viewing the outstanding coastal scenery, including the Twelve Apostles. Ongoing work includes maintaining boardwalks and the carpark, and protecting surrounding vegetation.

### LOCH ARD GORGE

This area contains some of the most outstanding scenery in the park, a number of spectacular geological features, and several sites holding a fascination for most visitors because of associations with the story of the Loch Ard. Consequently it receives very heavy visitor use.

Outstanding scenic and geological features include cliff views, beached cove and caves, close rockstacks and the blowhole.

The area is also high in nature conservation values. Short-tailed shearwaters (Mutton-birds) on Mutton-bird Island are of great interest to visitors. The birds make extraordinary migrations to and from the Bering Straits near Russia. The huge numbers of birds arriving at nesting sites in the breeding season are a spectacular sight that impresses visitors. Rare and restricted plants are also found in the area.

The Loch Ard Gorge was named after the disastrous wreck of the Loch Ard. The ship foundered at the base of Mutton-bird Island, and the rescue of two survivors occurred in Loch Ard Gorge. The nearby cemetery has a plaque listing the names of those drowned by the shipwreck.

Steps into the Loch Ard Gorge were replaced in 1986/87 as a first step to improving the facilities. In 1994 the carparks, road system and walking tracks were extensively upgraded. The siting of these facilities was determined partly by access and visitor information considerations and partly by safety issues. After the collapse of London Bridge in 1990 a geological report was conducted for the park. Its conclusions expressed some concern for the stability of the area around and inland of the Blowhole. It was therefore decided to close the public road in this vicinity.

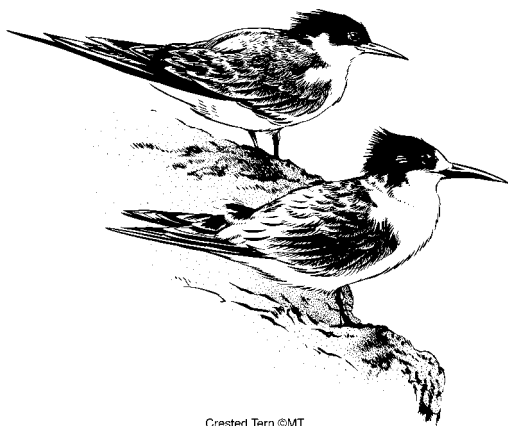
Three signposted walks, all beginning at the main carpark were also established in 1994 to provide visitors with information about the geology, plants and animals, and the shipwreck history of the area. In total nine signs explain features of interest along the walking tracks.

Loch Ard Gorge and the Sherbrook River estuary (not Sherbrook Ocean beach) are two of the few sheltered, relatively safe swimming beaches on the coast and are in heavy use during hot weather. Several headlands (especially Broken Head) and rockshelves are popular fishing sites.

The siting of toilets is currently under investigation by engineers. There is a clear need for such facilities, particularly for visitors entering the park from the east. If visitors take full advantage of the site they could be in the area for two or three hours. The convenience of locating the toilets at the carpark has to be balanced against drainage and geological considerations as well as the provision of water. Habitat protection in the surrounding area must also be taken into account.

### **PORT CAMPBELL TOWNSHIP and Discovery Walk**

Port Campbell is the most important accommodation and service centre on the Great Ocean Road between Apollo Bay and Warrnambool. The facilities and services provided, particularly the foreshore facilities, Caravan Park and Information Centre, make a considerable contribution to tourism along this road as do certain facilities outside the limits of the park such as the Port Campbell jetty.



Crested Tern ©MT

Careful and coordinated planning is essential if the Township is to be developed for visitor use and the requirements of residents in the expanding Township are to be met, without compromising the important conservation values and the attractive environment of the Valley. The Port Campbell Consultative Committee and the Progress Association aim to provide such a focus for coordinated action and development in the township.

The area around the township contains high conservation values. The estuary in the national park includes several rare and restricted plant species and habitat for a range of waterbirds. The heathlands north of the Great Ocean Road and east of the Township are rich plant and animal communities.

Discovery Walk, which can be approached from the Port Campbell foreshore by crossing the creek, or from the Great Ocean Road west of the township, was upgraded in 1994. The track is 2 kilometres long and takes about one and a half hours for the return trip. Information signs along the track explain the features to walkers.

### **LONDON BRIDGE**

A major attraction in the area is London Bridge, a small headland at the exposed south-western corner of the promontory, which was linked to the mainland by a narrow land bridge. London Bridge has been widely publicised and could be instantly recognised by many visitors. However in January 1990, the narrow land bridge collapsed leaving only a small arch structure isolated from the mainland. The event illustrates the dynamic nature of the coastline and the forces of nature. It attracted considerable media attention and increased visitor interest.

Before London Bridge collapsed, visitors enjoyed venturing across the rock bridge on foot to gain an experience of being on an island surrounded by the turbulent sea. However now the best place to view or photograph the feature is from the viewing platforms provided on the cliff.

The promontory is bounded by cliffs which vary in height and form according to their location and degree of exposure. A major drainage line bisects the land surface along a northeast-southwest axis, terminating at the cliff line above the London Bridge Beach.

The open heathlands covering the area are rich in plant species and small mammals. A small breeding population of Little Penguins occur under the cliff and in sand covered rock falls at London Bridge beach.

Fishing occurs at a number of sites along the tall sheer cliffs of the eastern flank of the promontory, and a vehicular track provides access to these sites and to the London Bridge area.

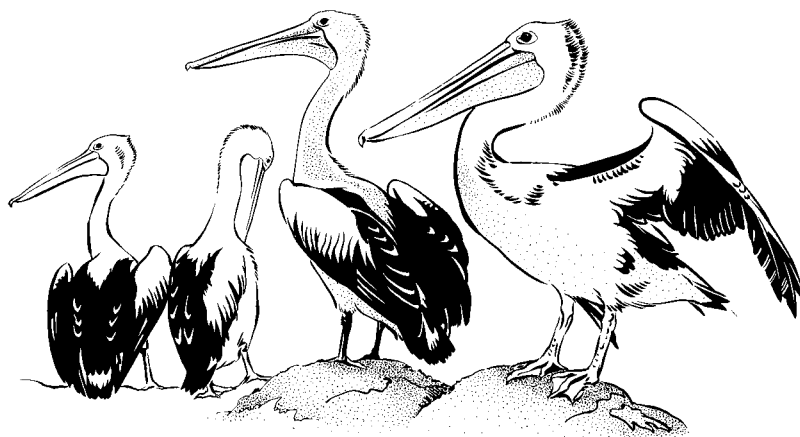
A carpark was established in 1991 to accommodate 30 cars and 3 buses. This is linked to the Great Ocean Road by a short section of sealed road. An interpretative sign about London Bridge was erected when the viewing platform was built.

## **CURDIES INLET**

Curdies Inlet (dune system and beach) is located at the western end of Port Campbell National Park. Vegetation is mostly open-scrub, but over many years much of the dunes near Curdies Inlet has been planted with Marram Grass. The light sandy soils, especially on the frontal dunes, are prone to wind erosion and easily disturbed by visitors.

For most of the year visitor numbers are low. Most visitors are sightseers, swimmers or sunbakers, or inlet or ocean anglers. In the Christmas school holidays, many holiday makers residing in Peterborough walk across the Curdies Inlet bar onto the beach. Others enter the area from the Great Ocean Road.

In 1986/87 Vic Roads reconstructed the eastern approaches to the Curdies Inlet Bridge, as part of a project to reconstruct the bridge. They also constructed a new access road and carpark near the Inlet. There is a narrow fenced track through the vegetated dunes to a small interpretative sign that shows the location of the Schomberg shipwreck and then to the beach.



Australian Pelican ©MT