

Camp Gregory— A Veteran's Retreat on Our Doorstep

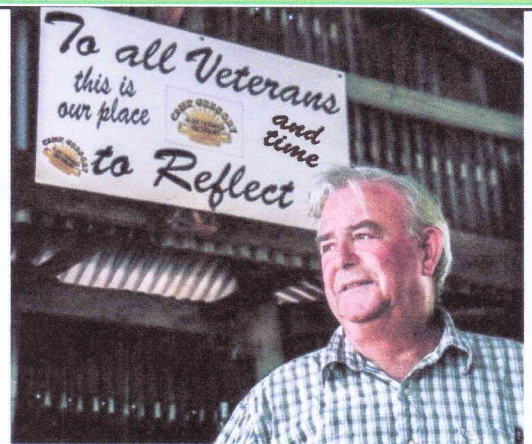
Contact details for Camp Gregory are on page 15 of Ricochet. Members who have been there speak of it in glowing terms. Furthermore it's only a few hours drive from the Sunshine Coast. For those who don't know much about the retreat, this article, reproduced from ABC Wide Bay, gives some insight.

A Vietnam veteran, Roger Dwyer, has created a free bush retreat to help veterans find peace, purpose and a place to talk.

He established Camp Gregory Veterans' Retreat when he realised ex-service personnel sometimes needed to get away from it all and talk to others with shared

experiences, like navigating the health system," Mr Spain said. "I do a lot of work helping other veterans with their entitlements and welfare work."

Mr Spain said the camp had been vital in bringing veterans together, both young and old.



Roger Dwyer, the founder of Camp Gregory

experiences.

The bush camp nestled on the bank of the Gregory River, halfway between Hervey Bay and Bundaberg in Queensland, has been developed to help veterans combat Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

"Its prime purpose is to look after veterans and their families," he said. "A lot of veterans suffer with PTSD and one of the issues is the fact that they can't stay in closed rooms and handle noises."

The camp has been under development for seven years, and has largely been built by visiting veterans.

"We've had a lot of work done by veterans, I'm talking 1,000 hours of voluntary work," Mr Dwyer said.

The retreat is located on a 16-hectare property owned by Mr Dwyer and allows for veterans to bring their own caravans and tents.

The retreat also offers accommodation facilities in the form of dongas, a camp kitchen, bathrooms, and other shared facilities.

Mr Dwyer said he has been motivated to create a retreat not just for his own generation of Vietnam veterans, but for veterans of all ages and conflicts. He said his concern for the younger veterans was increasing due to the current high rate of suicide among returned military personnel.

"In 2016 there were 80 military suicides, in 2017 there were 84 suicides, and these are all young people. We've got a responsibility to curtail that."

Mr Dwyer said there were marked differences between the experiences of his generation of Vietnam Veterans integrating back in to society and today's Veterans. He said that many of his generation had their jobs held while serving and had the opportunity to return to their former work and lives.

"The problem today is these younger people do not have that opportunity. There have been a lot of them who have been employed full time by the military from the ages of 16, 17 and 18 and now they are 35 or 40. They've served their time, they've supported their country and now they've got nothing to do. There are no jobs for them."

Daniel Spain, at 28, is a young veteran who understands firsthand the challenges of integrating back into society.

"As a civilian there are things in life you are not used to



Daniel Spain, an Afghanistan vet, is a regular visitor

"These older guys have been through a lot of things we have, whether it is in the military or in life. "There's a lot of skills between us. I like to think that some of the older veterans learn just as much from us younger generation as we do off them."

Mr Spain said there had been a lot of positives to come out of the friendships made at the retreat.

"A lot of these guys are old enough to be my parent or grandparent, but we are just the same; we are all just mates. If we are not feeling so good, we can ring each other up and say we are heading up to the camp. Unfortunately some of the guys don't have much family and for all intents and purposes this place is family for them."

Mr Dwyer believed the retreat was essential in helping veterans recover and combat the PTSD that many suffered from.

He believed everyone could learn from the mistakes of his generation.

"When we came back there was no mention of PTSD and no compensation for 30 years," Mr Dwyer said.

He was thankful the condition was now acknowledged by the Federal Government, but believed more work needed to be done to support those suffering from the disorder. Mr Dwyer plans to advocate for similar retreats to be built around Australia.

"You can't imagine how useful it is to have people around the campfire talking," he said. "It's essential."

Source:-ABC Wide Bay By Trudie Leigo and Brad Marsellos

