

National Vietnam Vets Museum, Phillip Island.

Back in 2014 we had a [story on the Museum](#) and as it's been some time since we had a look through it, while in Melbourne we decided to check it out again.



The museum is an easy 1¾ hours drive south of Melbourne, on Phillip Island and if you've never been, you should. Phillip Island has a lot to offer, you can spend about 2½ to 3 hours in the Museum then rest of the day looking over the island itself.

Back in 2014 we were shown over the exhibits by Gary "Gus" Parker (right), one of the instigators of the Museum and a bloke we'd known for quite a while but sadly Gary is no longer with us, having fought the big fight but unfortunately lost the battle with the dreaded cancer.

We noticed quite a few changes since our last visit, the outside of the building has had a complete revamp, exhibits have been added and a lot of the exhibits inside have been worked on and tarted up.





A sign on the wall at the entrance gives a description of the origin of the museum, it says:

The National Vietnam Veterans Museum (NVVM) was originally founded by Vietnam veterans to help and support veterans to cope better with their experiences during the Vietnam War and after their return to Australia.

The NVVM is dedicated to veterans of Australia's longest war, the Vietnam War, from 1962 to 1975.

In 1996 Vietnam veteran John Methven (right) and his wife Krishna joined the "Vets Connect" ride around Australia for six weeks, driving a Land Rover and display trailer full of his personal memorabilia as an embryonic mobile museum. Fuel was funded by the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) to help "Vet Connect" reach out to many veterans who had "gone bush" and to make them aware that the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia (VVAA) had been formed to lobby for recognition and improved welfare and conditions for all veterans affected by the war.



A growing collection of memorabilia, images and stories were contributed to the trailer both during and following this tour. When the Methvens retired to San Remo, next to Phillip Island, a garage was arranged in March 1998 and this became the first Vietnam Veterans Museum, open to the public. Donations continued to arrive, space became an issue and the collection moved to a new space in 1999 which had previously been five shops.

The museum was run and manned by volunteers and came under the auspices of the Patriotic Trust Fund (set up after the Second World War by the Victorian Government). By late 2003, the museum was forced to re-locate once again and with the concurrence of the VVAA, 1¼ acres of land was purchased next to the Phillip Island airstrip.

A Bellman hangar was purchased and transported on site and a number of "new" veterans joined the VVAA Museum Sub-Branch, one foundation member was the Methven's pet dog, "Jack". Two committees were established, one for the sub-branch welfare and pension obligations and one to focus on the museum for business planning and fundraising.

The first major grant was \$30,000 from the DVA. Then the Vietnamese community raised \$20,000. Most funds for the museum development come from the veteran community, through donations from VVAA sub-branches, RSLs and individuals who purchased either a family or individual "brick" as part of the museum's "Buy-a-Brick" campaign. The Victorian Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club and Royal Australian Army Service Corps (RAASC) also raised nearly \$20,000. A joint application with the Bass Coast Shire to the Regional Development Victoria's Small Towns Development Fund raised \$250,000, along with a Federal grant for \$58,500 from the Regional Partnerships Program.



The San Remo Museum site was closed on the 15th November, 2006, relocated to the new permanent Phillip Island site and re-opened on the 15th December, 2006. On the 9th March 2007, the new National Vietnam Veterans Museum was opened by the Premier of Victoria, Mr Steve



Bracks MP in front of about 2,000 veterans, families and dignitaries. The National Vietnam Veterans Museum vision had been achieved.

A second hangar was added and a workshop to support an aircraft restoration program established. In December, 2012, the NVVM became a company limited by guarantee and an independent museum managed by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) reporting to a Board of Directors. While the museum continued to accommodate the VVAA Museum sub-branch, the sub-branch was no longer responsible for museum management.

The first CEO was Gary Parker and the first Chairman of the Board was John Methven OAM, the museum founder, The Board also appointed, as first patron of the museum, Air Vice Marshall Alan Reed, AO (right). All three were Vietnam Veterans.



The NVVM remains the spiritual home for Vietnam veterans and protects and preserves their legacy and heritage arising from their participation in the Vietnam War. Today, the National Vietnam Veterans Museum seeks to remember, interpret and relate the experience of the veterans of the Vietnam era and the enduring impact of the war on society.

I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.

Some of the exhibits at the museum include:



Caribou A4-231, This aircraft joined the RAAF in 1965 and served with 38 Sqn at Richmond, then Amberley then Townsville. It was discharged in 2009 and flown to Oakey where it sat for 6 years until being acquired by the Museum. It's now in dire need of some TLC. The Museum also got A4-204 which is in bits out the back, looks to being used as a Christmas tree.



Grumman Tracker. The RAN bought this aircraft, one of a total of 32, from the US Navy in 1977 and operated it until it was retired in 1984. It was acquired by the Museum in 2013 and after some TLC, now sits outside the front of the museum.



Iroquois A2 -110. This aircraft was delivered to 9 Sqn in Vung Tau in 1969. It was repatriated to Australia in 1971 and took up residence at Amberley until the Sqn began to be re-equipped with the Blackhawk in 1988. The Sqn moved to Townsville in 89 and all aircraft were transferred to the Army in January 1990.



International 6X6 AACO (Australian Army Cab Over) These trucks were built by International Harvester at their Dandenong (Vic) plant. Two assembly lines worked in tandem, with Army vehicles occupying one line and trucks for commercial civvy use produced on the other. The Army eventually obtained a total of 2,370 of the vehicles, in both 4X4 and 6X6 configurations. They were powered by a 6 cylinder petrol engine, burning 50 litres every 100km





Ford M151 Jeep. This little vehicle, which is an improved version of the original WW2 jeep, was built by the Ford Motor company and is distinguishable by its horizontal slotted grill. The Willys company, which also manufactured Jeeps, had a trademark on the traditional seven slot vertical grill so Ford developed their own. Production of this model commenced in 1960 and stopped in 1982 when more than 100,000 of these great little vehicles had been built. They were powered by a 2.3 litre inline 4 cylinder OHV petrol engine. In 1988, due to demand, production was restarted and today the little vehicle is still in service in many countries around the world. They are fitted with a four speed manual gear box which drives the rear wheels. Four wheel drive can be selected when needed however, there is no reduction box.



Centurion Tank. Although Vietnam was not a tank war, the Australian Centurion was a very handy machine and proved its worth many times over. In 1965, Australia sent an infantry battalion to Vietnam, increasing its size to a full brigade in 1966. Australian M113 APC's also participated in the fighting, but their poor firepower and thin armour did not allow the Australians to use them in the thickest fighting. In September 1967, the Australian government decided they would reinforce the Australian forces in Vietnam with a Centurion tank unit. This caused a wave of criticism, as the military "experts" proclaimed that in the thick jungle terrain of Vietnam, the tanks would be all but useless and they would become mobile pillboxes at best. Before they were sent to Vietnam, they were modified by the 4th Base Workshops in Bandiana, Vic.

9 Centurions were loaded aboard the Jeparit and reached Vung Tau in Feb 1968. After a short period of training with infantry, they participated in their first combat operation in March 1968, called "Pinaroo". Its task was to destroy strong Vietcong units, occupying the badly accessible Long Hai mountain range, south from the main Australian forces base in Nui Dat. During the three week operation, the tanks proved themselves to be very good at destroying enemy positions. These positions were very well placed and only direct tank gun fire could destroy them



at the distance of several hundred meters. The remaining positions that weren't blasted away were crushed under the tracks of the 50 ton beasts.

In September 1968, the number of Centurions in Vietnam was increased to 28. The tanks prowled the jungle with minimal speeds, sometimes they advanced as little as 500 meters per hour due to the thick flora – this caused extreme fuel consumption, which jumped to 12 gallons per mile (2,800 litres per 100 km), which is why aircraft had to bring in huge amounts of fuel in giant rubber 4,500 litre bladders.

Despite the initial Australian worries, the Centurions have proved themselves to be very useful on the battlefield of Vietnam and they also turned out to be very resilient when taking damage, withstanding multiple shell hits. The Australian Centurions fought in Vietnam until September 1971, when the Australian units were pulled out of the country. They influenced the fighting in the Phuoc Tuy province a lot and the Australian “diggers” remember them fondly to this day.

They carried a crew of four, a Commander, Gunner, Loader and driver and were powered by a Rolls Royce V12 Meteor petrol engine with a top speed of about 34 kph. They had a 5 speed crash gear-box and drum brakes. Armament consisted of a twenty pounder main gun and two machine guns.

In all, Australia had 131 Centurions which were all retired in 1977.



A84-307 Canberra. This particular aircraft was originally meant for the RAF but in 1950 was allocated to the RAAF. This was the first Canberra to arrive in Australia and arrived at 1AD at Laverton in August 1951. It was shortly handed over to ARDU at Laverton and from there it spent time at Amberley, Avalon and several postings overseas until it was retired in 1973. It is one of three aircraft brought out from the UK before production started in Australia and is the world's oldest surviving Canberra. There is more info on the Canberra [HERE](#)



Part of the ground floor display in hangar one.

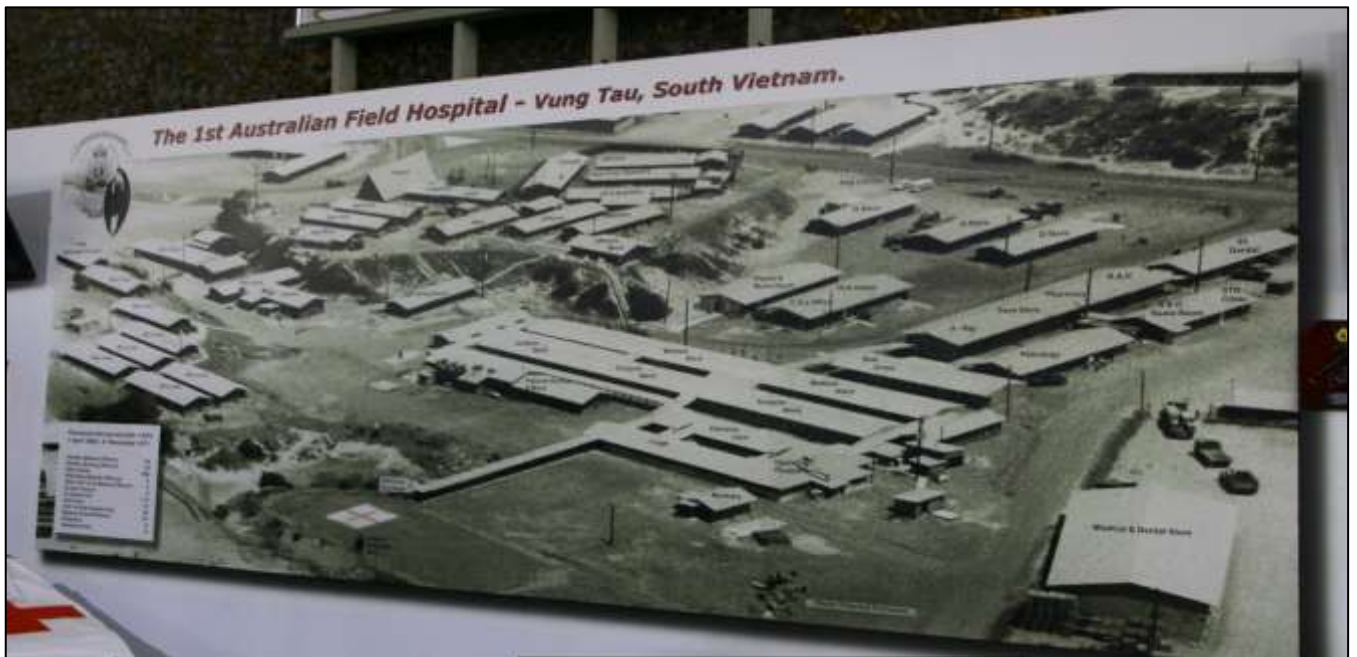


The Museum has a 20 minute holographic light and sound show which you can watch in their darkened theatrette. This show gives an overview of Australia's involvement in Vietnam, explains why we were there, describes the conditions in country and the deplorable treatment personnel received on their return to Australia. Definitely well worth the time to watch it.

The only reason I would take up walking is so that I could hear heavy breathing again



Bell AH-1G Cobra attack helicopter. The Cobra was a heavily armed ground attack helicopter used by the U.S. Army in Vietnam to support Australian and U.S. Army ground operations. In addition to the M197 three barrelled 20mm Gatling gun, it carried eight anti-armour missiles and forty eight 2.75mm unguided air to ground rockets. This particular aircraft served in Vietnam from 1968 until 1971 and was damaged twice in combat. It is currently finished in a low visibility all-over mid green which includes the full US Army insignia and carries the Serial No. 0-15092.



Back Beach hospital. (Click the pic for a bigger view)



Back Beach Hospital, or 1 (Aust) Field Hospital to give it its official name, was raised at Vung Tau on the 1st April 1968 and withdrawn from Vietnam on the 21st November, 1971. The hospital site was first occupied by 2 Field Ambulance (1966 - 67) followed by 8 Field Ambulance (1967 - 68). When the hospital was raised, in 1968, 8 Field Ambulance moved to Nui Dat where it remained until 1972.

The radio call-sign "Vampire" was used by all three medical units – someone obviously had a sense of humour.

In October 1969 the American 36 Evacuation Hospital, which was on the base at Vung Tau, closed, requiring the surgical facilities of the Hospital to cope with all casualties, including severe injuries previously treated by the US facility. The high standard of para-medical services provided by the hospital led to a remarkable statistic, 98.5% of Australian soldiers who reached the hospital alive survived their injuries or illness.

Personnel who served with the Hospital April 1968 – November 1971:

RAAMC (Medical Officers)	82	RAANC (Nursing Officers)	43
Other ranks	586	RAN (Navy Medical Officers)	8
RAAF (RAAF medical Officers)	2	Civilian doctors	4
33 Dental unit	111	Red Cross	21
Det 1 st Field Hygiene Coy	58	Medical & Dental stores	37
Chaplains	9	Salvation Army	9

The Museum is well worth a visit, if you're in the vicinity, give it a go. The Museum is open every day from 10.00am to 5.00pm, except for Good Friday, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Admission costs are:

Adults	\$15
Child (5-15 years)	\$10
Children under 5	Free
Family (2 adults, 3 children)	\$40
Seniors, Aged Pensioners, Vietnam Veterans	\$12
Pre-booked groups	\$10 per person
Pre-booked school groups	\$10 per student

I have to walk early in the morning, before my brain figures out what I'm doing



After the Museum, we decided to have a look over the Island, first stop, which is just a bit further “up the road” from the Museum is the Phillip Island racing circuit.



Motorsport has been synonymous with Phillip Island since 1928, when British driver A.C.R. White raced his Austin 7 to victory in the very first Australian Grand Prix, held for cars on a 6.5 mile open road course. The Grand Prix was held annually until 1935, but by then motorcycle racing had taken hold, with events held on a 12 mile unsealed public road course until 1941, when excessive corner dust finished racing.

However, the appetite for competition had been whetted and plans for a permanent circuit were laid down in 1952 with the formation of the Phillip Island Auto Racing Club (PIARC). Three hundred acres of land is purchased by the PIARC for £6,000 (\$12,000). The new circuit opened in March 1956 with a car race but later that year motorcycling returned to Phillip Island.

The first Armstrong 500 touring car race was held at Phillip Island in 1960, won by Frank Coad and John Roxburgh driving a Vauxhall Cresta. The following year, Bob Jane and Harry Firth won in a Mercedes-Benz 220E, while the 1962 race fell to them again, this time in a Ford Falcon. However the constant pounding from the big touring cars caused the breakup of the track surface and after the third edition, the race switched to Bathurst in 1963, forcing temporary closure.



However it was not all bad news for Phillip Island, as the ownership changed hands in 1962, when the track was purchased by former racer Len Lukey, who joined with PIARC in a rebuilding programme. Racing returned to the circuit in 1967 and another golden era seemed to beckon. Unfortunately, Lukey passed away in 1978, leaving the circuit to fall once again into disrepair with only sporadic meetings held, and the land essentially just being farmed by its owners.

In 1985 Phillip Island Circuit purchased by Placetac Pty Ltd, with the view to re-introducing racing to the famous facility. Then Wayne Gardner burst on to the international motorcycle scene, winning the 500cc world championship in 1987. On the back of the euphoria surrounding that triumph, Australia scored a Grand Prix, with engineer and promoter Bob Barnard and his Barfield company arranging to run it at The Island. Half a kilometre was cut from the track, leaving it at 4.445 kilometres, as the then vast sum of A\$5 million was spent upgrading it. Gardner, already a national icon, captured his country's imagination with two rides in 1989 and '90 that are recalled among the greatest moments in Australia's illustrious sporting history. Disaster struck again in the 1990s though. The decision to ban tobacco and alcohol





advertising by the Victoria State Government would make 1990 the last GP event at Phillip Island for seven years, however, the 500cc race would prove to be the most thrilling of the year with Wayne Gardner holding off a determined Mick Doohan to win by less than a second.

The Victorian Government had merely been early adopters of laws which would ultimately see the end of tobacco sponsorship in motor racing, so by 1997 the Grand Prix was restored to Phillip Island once more. Doohan was on course for victory in the year of its return before an uncharacteristic tumble but made amends the next year in probably the most emotional of all the victories which netted him five world titles.

The circuit was brought into new ownership in 2004, when it was sold to Linfox Property Group Pty Ltd for an undisclosed figure. Under the new ownership, a \$2 million safety upgrade was carried out, primarily to improve safety for motorcycle racing. Major works were carried out on the pit exit and entry, safety barriers were moved further back from the track in several places and new and bigger run-offs and gravel traps were installed. Further investment was made at the end of the 2012 season when the entire track was resurfaced in a \$3 million upgrade.

The setting for the circuit is fabulous, right on the coast with plenty of hilly spots to sit and watch the races. The day we were there they were holding an event, motorcycles were hurtling around the circuit at a million miles an hour so we were restricted to where we could go without paying the admission price, so we had a quick look and then moved on.

Every time I hear the dirty word 'exercise', I wash my mouth out with chocolate.

Next stop on our clockwise circuit of the Island was the penguin parade centre.



Phillip Island's iconic Penguin Parade is one of Australia's most popular tourist attractions and in July 2019 it opened the doors to an exciting and visually breathtaking new visitor centre.



The new centre and car park areas have been moved back from the coast from where the original 30 year old building stood returning that area of land to the penguins. Up to 1400 breeding penguins will soon be able to reclaim this area as their own. The new centre contains a state-of-the-art theatre, capable of seating up to 100 people, a café, sit down restaurant and modern retail spaces and can manage visitor demands including a peak of over 3,000 people.



The centre was designed with the environment in mind, it contains an array of 666 solar panels on the roof, a water filtration system to recycle rainwater for non-potable use, increased roof and floor insulation and double-glazed windows.



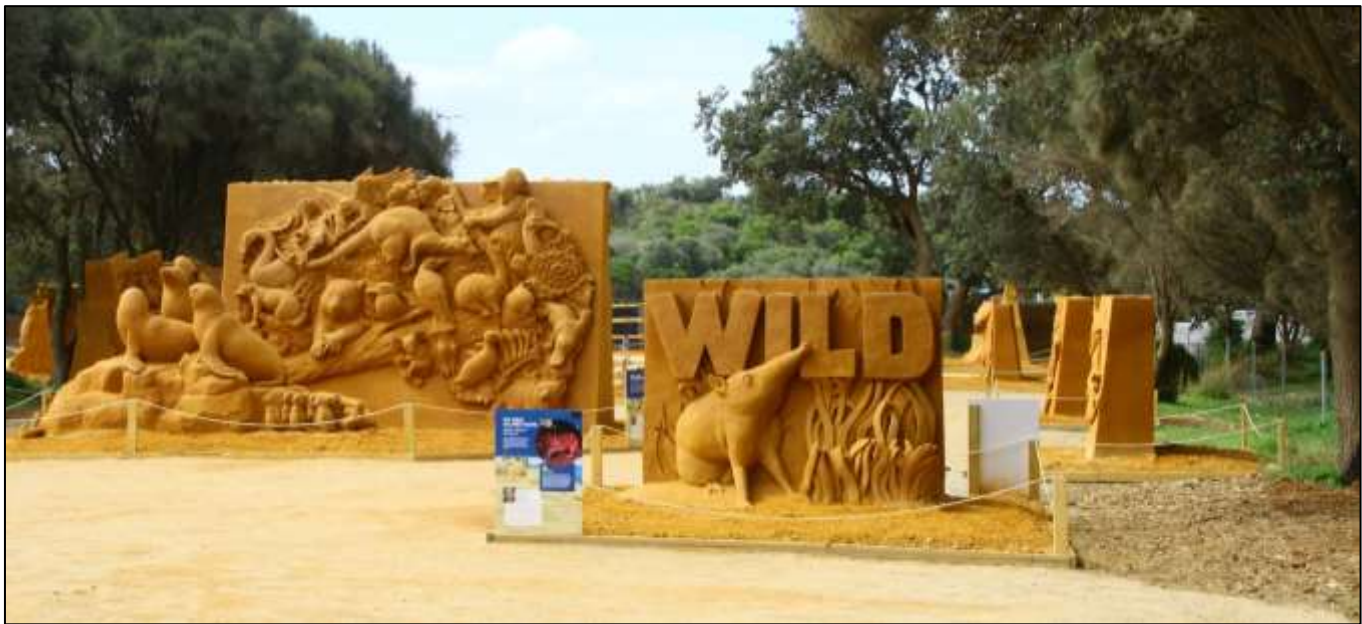


Low carbon building materials have been used throughout the centre's construction, including Victorian Ash hardwood for the impressive laminated beams.

Its spectacular architectural design was acknowledged internationally, having been announced as a winner at the 2019 International Architecture Awards, out of a field of over 380 submissions from 41 countries.

I do have flabby thighs, but fortunately my stomach covers them.

Just a short walk from the Penguin centre was the "Wild" sand sculpture exhibition. This exhibition opened on Boxing Day 2019 and is open from 10.00am until 6.00pm every day. Those amazingly talented artists have used over 700 tonnes of "Brickies Sand" to produce intricate sculptures which are then given a waterproof coating to protect them from heavy rain.



"Brickies Sand" is a type of sand that is used most commonly in the bricklaying and masonry industry. It has a higher level of clay content which allows it to become "stickier". The artists moved to the Gold Coast and produced their wonderful sculptures along the waterfront, in front of Maccas, from the 14th Feb to the 1st March 2020.

The advantage of exercising every day is so when you die, they'll say,
'Well, he looks good doesn't he.'



From the Penguin Centre is was just a short drive to the western end of the Island to “The Nobbies” from where, if you’re lucky, you can see Australian Fur Seals on Seal Rocks.



Australian fur seals were over-harvested during the 1800s and have taken a long time to recover. During most of the 1900s less than 10,000 pups were born annually but numbers started to increase during the 1980s and 1990s. A species-wide estimate of live pups in 2002 recorded a near-doubling of annual pup production since the 1980s.

Live pup numbers increased again in 2007 when it was estimated the total number of seals was in the vicinity of 120,000. Seals live on a diet of various species of fish and also squid which they forage for in Bass Strait.

We didn’t see a one!!



There is a kiosk on the point but we thought it a bit tired.

If you are going to try cross-country skiing, start with a small country.



Continuing with our clockwise circuit brought us to Cowes which is the main settlement on Phillip Island and which sits on the northern side of the Island. It has a population of 4,850 people, big enough to support both a Woolies and Coles stores as well as an IGA. It has a lovely main street which drops down to the water.



From Cowes it was time to head back to Melbourne but not before checking out the Koala Reserve. The Reserve has a boardwalk which provides exceptional koala viewing inside a secure fenced off area which protects the koalas from dingoes, wild dogs etc.

If you've ever been koala looking you'll know that, apart from dropping on the occasional tourist, they don't do a lot. They just curl up in a tree and ignore the world.

Still, it's a bit of a thrill to see them, if you live in a city apart from going to a zoo, you're never likely to see one but here you can see them 'in the wild'.

Unlike a zoo, the Koala Reserve is really unique as visitors get the chance to see them in their natural habitat, living as they would in the wild. The Reserve has been essential in saving Phillip Island's koala population in its natural bush environment.

Another spectacular area is the woodland walk. You wander through natural bush, amongst hundreds of different species of Australian wildlife, including wallabies, possums, echidnas and snakes.





The Koala Reserve also features a visitor interpretation centre with gift shop and educational displays, which visitors will find extremely fascinating and informative. The Koala Reserve is part of the Phillip Island Nature Parks and

From there it was time to cross the bridge back onto the mainland and the return trip back to Melbourne. When in Melbourne, set aside a day and do the tour of Phillip Island, it's well worth it.





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