

Cairns Surf Lifesaving Club History

In 1917 Cairns Royal Lifesaving Society was formed and the Society used Freshwater Creek for training and examinations.

In 1919 Cairns Royal Lifesaving Society experienced low interest due to the loss of men in war, rations and poor social conditions.

In 1924 the Club was established and formed an affiliation with the Royal Life Saving Society. The Club's first fund raising activity at Yorkeys Knob raised a total of two shillings and six pence.

In December 1925 the Club purchased two lifesaving reels. The first reel was installed at Double Island Beach (Palm Cove) and the other at Yorkeys Knob.

Two hundred people attended the unveiling of the Yorkeys Knob reel and witnessed the examination of three new squads for surf medallions. Seventeen out of the eighteen candidates passed the examination.

Surf Life Saving Queensland (SLSQ) was formed in 1930.

In the 1930's the Club built its first clubhouse on the shores of the Cairns Esplanade. The clubhouse consisted of a ten foot tin shed and was situated where the Cairns Port Authority building now stands on the corner of Wharf Street and the Esplanade. This was before the Council reclaimed large tracts of land in the area. The clubhouse sat only forty metres from the shoreline.

Club members patrolled Yorkeys Knob which at the time was Cairns' most popular beach.

Club minutes from the 1930's detail a mysterious sting by an "unknown marine object" which is thought to be the earliest record of Irukandji jellyfish.

Between 1939 and 1945 the Club ceased to operate due to War World II.

Between June 1945 and August 1949 there were five recorded shark attack deaths at Trinity Beach, Ellis Beach and Yorkeys Knob.

In 1946 a wooden shark proof enclosure was opened at Machans Beach and Club members used the enclosure for swimming training.

In the 1950's club members used the Cairns Amateur Swimming Club, which was a salt water swimming pool located where the Hilton Hotel now stands, for training and examinations.

In 1953 the Club purchased two adjoining blocks of land at Palm Cove for a total of 450 Pounds and made Palm Cove its new home.

The Australian Army donated surf reels and an air raid siren for use as a shark alarm.

The Club's equipment was transported to Palm Cove on Sundays by a gentleman who called past the Cairns Esplanade clubhouse with his truck and got Club members to drop him at the Bowls Club for a day of jacks and drinks.

In later years Club members relied on council workers to drive them to and from Palm Cove.

The decision to purchase the two adjoining blocks at Palm Cove provided the Club with a solid financial base – a beautiful waterfront location of considerable size and commercial value.

The Club was subsidised by the then Harbour Board, Cairns City Council and Mulgrave Shire Council. The subsidy allowed the Club to hire a truck every Sunday to transport members and equipment to and from Palm Cove.

In 1961 the Club constructed a club house on its Palm Cove site.

The Club house was a small blue asbestos shack and was used as a first aid room and for storing boats. The clubhouse also had rudimentary cooking facilities.

The club later purchased a one room house which had been used by the army in World War II which became the home for the Club's first caretaker.

In the 1960's there were no shark nets and the members used "shark drums" to act as an early warning signal – two four gallon drums were floated 400 metres off shore attached to strong line and large baited hooks. Club members would watch the drums from their tower and if the drums submerged they would clear the water and investigate. A Club member once pulled in a twelve foot pregnant tiger shark which contained forty two baby sharks.

On another occasion a shark permanently latched itself onto a club members oar and ended up being towed back to shore and dragged onto Palm Cove beach.

Shark nets were installed at Palm Cove in 1961.

Marine stingers had become a problem for bathers by the 1960's and fisherman use to set wire netting fish traps at right angles to the beach at Palm Cove so that when the northerly winds blew jellyfish into shore they became caught in these nets and were eaten by turtles. Once this fishing practice stopped, stings became more common at Palm Cove.

Communication between Palm Cove and Cairns ambulance was only available through a Weston two way radio which was donated to the Club.

In 1964 the Club almost folded. Membership was reduced to just six members due to numerous fatalities from jellyfish stings. A theory emerged that jellyfish mostly moved in the lower parts of water so members constructed a pontoon made out of 44 gallon drums and wood and anchored it in deep water 200 metres off shore. The Club members used this pontoon as a training platform.

In 1967 the Club got permission from the Department of Fisheries to trial its own stinger nets – 2.5 metre high bait nets which were floated using cork lines and secured using lead sinkers. Club patrols involved snorkelling around the bottom of nets checking sinkers and collecting sea food for dinner.

In 1967 protective clothing was developed.

In the late 1960's surf craft was introduced for the first time – surf skis, surf boats and paddle boards which offered a new dimension for surf life saving competitors. The wood ply craft were mostly hand crafted by locals.

In 1969 the existing amenity block was constructed.

In 1970 the Club's Cairns Esplanade club house was pulled down.

In 1973 the recently demolished waterfront clubhouse building was constructed at Palm Cove. The building was the largest structure at Palm Cove at the time.

In the mid 1970's during cyclone season, the Barron River would flood and people living at the northern beaches would be cut off from town and the Club's club house would sometimes feed and accommodate over 100 people. The club house freezer was full of fish caught regularly by Club members off Double Island.

In 1975 Inflatable Rubber Boats ("IRBs") were introduced as rescue equipment and the Club was the first club in Queensland to receive a "spotter" craft which was supplied by SLSQ.

In 1976 the existing Supporters Club building and club rooms to the rear of the recently demolished club house building were constructed.

All labour was provided by volunteers who worked solely for beer and barbecue.

In 1981 nippers were introduced to the Club and SLSQ permitted women to become patrolling members for the first time.

In 1982 the Masters category was introduced to surf life saving.

In 1982 the Club secured the first sporting club licence ever issued in Queensland.

In the 1990's Club members began patrolling in the winter months rather than the summer months and paid lifeguards were introduced to surf life saving in North Queensland.

Between the 1960's and the 1990's the club gradually purchased adjoining lots at Palm Cove. The current site now comprises of five individual allotments.

At some point the Club was afforded an opportunity to purchase the vacant land on which Coral Horizons is now built but the Club declined. The asking price at the time is thought to have been \$50,000.00 - an opportunity missed.