

Tabourie Memories

Tabourie Caravan Park Days

An old style camping ground that wanted to stay just that way!
Col & Norma Hickman

In 1988 the Caravan Park could best be described as a camping ground with 190 Holiday Vans half a dozen for hire vans & not much else there was no fences no gates a sealed road running through to the beach with access for anyone no camp sites marked out or mapped no water map stop valves that didn't work no sewerage plant town water hooked straight into old plastic pipes sewerage pumps that were unable to disperse waste matter in busy times septic holding tanks that overflowed at Xmas, Easter & October long weekend. The dreaded Tabourie black sand and that's just a start!

The black sand was a problem for keeping toilets & showers clean especially in times of wet weather. It was also often used by mischievous campers to undo the shower roses and fill them with black sand (or worse) causing discomfort to unwary bathers! The Septic tanks have long been replaced with a good sewerage system but memories remain of nights spent clearing blockages especially on New Year's Eve when the Park could have many thousand holiday makers. One particular blockage involved an accumulation of coloured balloons or similar rubber goods!

The Holiday Van owners were proud of their Park & generally kept their areas neat and tidy. A mishap with roundup weed poison leaking out of the work trailer onto the lush grass along "Dapto Road" caused much concern when in a few weeks later double lines appeared in the centre of the grass road. Especially as the NSW Traffic Commander & his wife had just moved into that area & with comments such as "He's only just got here and he's already put double lines down the middle of the street!"

The McLeod Family was a very big family with about 10 or 11 children (I think 8 of their own and three adopted). They had a holiday van in Dapto Road & a fox moved in under their van & made its home there. This was reasonably well received as the fox caused no harm except it pinched shoes & stored them under the van. A tourist lost his expensive shoes left outside his tent one night. Asking around he was told to look under the foxes van where he might find his runners. Peering under van after van along Dapto Road a van owner asked the man "what was he looking for" to which he replied "Is this where the Fox lives?"



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Canoes for hire was a popular attraction and not long after they were available for hire one went missing thought to be stolen. Eighteen months later the McLeod boys found it deep in the mud way up the top of the lake, earning them a free canoe whenever they were in the Park!

The McLeod boys were looking for “Mal’s secret fishing spot” rumoured to be somewhere near “the Blue Hole “up the lake towards the main road. They were looking for Mal’s dumpsters (tobacco rollie butts) on the ground which would be a giveaway for the secret fishing hole. But Mal revealed that he always kept his butts in a matchbox so that he couldn’t be traced!

The Park was popular with schools and all kinds of groups. One visit was from the Army Reconnaissance Division. They set about mapping the area for some reason and were free to assist the Park in some building projects to pay for their accommodation. At that time the Council decided to invest some funds in improving amenities for patrons & tourists. A Vita 2000 set of exercise equipment & instruction signs were installed around the perimeter of the park at the same time as koppers log fencing. Thanks to the efforts of the Army Rec. Squad for their labour & expertise. At the same time a full-sized championship tennis court was laid and fenced. The Army Rec. boys then built a wooden shelter to go with the wire fencing.



The most entertaining part of the Army visit was one night they decide to play a trick on the Major. A game of “consequences” like “trick or treat” I suppose was organized & the major flunked out and the consequence was he had to “borrow” a garden gnome from a Van Owner’s verandah & return it in the morning! All seemed to go well until the fishing line attached to the Van Owners toe at one end and the other end was attached to the gnome. An irate Van flew out of his TV chair and called out to the Major “stop thief give me back my gnome or I’ll call the Police!” It was rumoured that the Boys worked extra hard the next day!

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Tricks were frequent in those days when you made your own fun. Not so good was the sign placed on the Notice Board asking all park resident to immediately go to beach to assist in freeing a beached whale. Several hours later a red faced lady came into the Managers Office demanding to know “If this was anything to do with it being the first of April. I’ve been all the way past Wairo and I couldn’t find the beached whale.” The Manager advised she was unaware of the sign. Liar, liar pants on fire!

Wairo beach was the scene of a particularly sad tragedy for a lady sailor who was seen in distress off Crampton Island. The sea that day was extremely rough & the Coastguard was summonsed. The yacht unfortunately did wash up on the beach. Frantic efforts by the Wairo Beach Tourist Park Owner with his excavator failed to break into the hull. The sight of personal belongings floating ashore such as coffee mugs, Nescafe jars, Cornflake packets etc. was most distressing! It was thought that the sailor was washed overboard & perished.

The Park tractor was part of numerous incidents not the least was when a worker from across the lake was assisting Xmas preparations requiring the cleaner van to be placed inside the Managers yard. It was a difficult maneuver requiring reversing the tractor and van around a very old septic tank the manager was told not to worry as the assistant gave an “I know tractors” assurance! Ding dong straight into the septic tank, Fergie’s wheel kept churning away into the bowels of the ditch! Turning off the ignition stopped the carnage but not the embarrassment!

The Park & its management was of some concern with the Village people especially at holiday periods & most campers were generally well behaved. Occasionally it was necessary to ask some groups to leave. One such occasion a group was becoming noisy and driving recklessly across the park. When the group went off for supplies their (most elaborate) bong was confiscated. On their return things got a bit ugly until a deal was struck “give us back our bong and we will leave quietly!” This they did bong but all

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night long they could be heard staggering in & out of the bushes just up the road! The Mission people were worried as they were in close proximity & the Police were called. Wisely the Police advised them to stay quite & stay put or else. It would have been dangerous to have them driving their cars on the road that night!



Another time a Van Owner who was affiliated with a Motor Bike Group had his van removed for non-payment of Storage fees. Big mistake! Firstly the Sherriff advised that he should have been consulted & he would have arranged removal. Secondly the Van Owner was most distressed when he learnt that his van had been removed! A phone conversation followed with threats of physical violence on the Manager and his family & burn down his cottage next weekend! A bodyguard was employed by Council to ensure the safety of the manager's family & to protect the patrons and property for that weekend! Still a bit frightening though!

Numerous news events created some interesting moments, e.g. the announcement that the Berlin Wall had come down was well greeted by all campers in the Park but especially 2 German couples who were in the Park backpacking at the time. To see them embracing and openly crying was lovely to see! A back pack was found beside the entrance road into the Park at the time of the Backpacker Murders. This created a lot of interest as it was thought that Ivan Milat may have been a regular visitor to the Park. Police were called in but there was no evidence that the backpack was in any way involved! Another time a hand was seen sticking out of the lake after a prolonged rainy period. Police were called in and the area was excavated to reveal the body was that of a large decomposed seal!

Each year one group of annual patrons (or patriots) would re-enact the Landing of the First Fleet beside the lake. A model ship would float onto the man-made beach near the old tree down in the corner of the

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Park. A man dressed up wearing a Captains hat would come ashore & much celebrating would follow! This practice may not happen today, though!

Most heartwarming was the way that long term annual campers embraced the concept of providing entertainment at holiday time. To see groups such as Grandstand Jazz, The Wongawilli Bush Band, as well as Jumping Castles, Clowns, Face painting, Bingo and many others. Good memories, good days! Just like the Tabourie of old was the cry!

Col & Norma Hickman

