

Tabourie Memories: Keith Jones

I was born in 1958 and my earliest memories were of the cottage (Lakeside) which was located, essentially, where the current BBQ facilities now exist. In fact, the large Bangalay gum on the western side of that area stood outside of one of the bedrooms of the cottage on the western side.

My (older siblings) would have better memories of our previous holiday destination of Huskisson further north but I do know that we used to camp underneath a big canvas tent. Apparently, some of us slept in the trailer (under cover) which would have been a hoot at the time. Lakeside was a lovely cottage with an outdoor dunny (somewhere about the middle of the current carpark) and a bathroom which was accessed via the covered verandah (on the eastern and northern sides). The bathroom had a bath and a “donkey” chip heater which provided us with the hot water for our holiday. As schools only had three terms back in the 60’s, we had two week holidays in the May and September term breaks. The weather was generally cool as it was either late autumn or early spring.

From memory, Fred and Joan James had the leases on the several cottages dotted around. Accordingly, they managed the holiday bookings and provided firewood (for heating and the donkey). Our mum and dad got to know the James’ very well so their son, Mike (and his dog Scamp) also provided beach worms for beach fishing on the north or south beaches.

Part of the early excitement, on arrival, was running down to Oak Ave to hire a dinghy from the Nelson’s (No 1). We all became very adept at rowing and manoeuvring the boat and learned the art of using oars to splash water on your “adversaries”. I think boat hire was around \$20 per week but it might have been per fortnight. Of course, there were no phones or devices for distraction. Heaven forbid, football was only played on Saturday afternoon and could only be received by radio. The upside of this communications poverty is that we made our own entertainment, and we all had a loose agreement with parents to be home in time for dinner. There was a lot of trust about in those days. I suspect that our parents actually had a better idea of what we were doing than we thought.

I think we stayed one holiday in Burrawarra (further up the sand dune next to Illagong. As a side note, the Castaway Units (built by Fred James) have black and white aerial photos of Tabourie (and Crampton Island) with numbers indicating some of the old cottage sites. Names from memory include Burrawarra, Banyandah, Illagong, Illoura, Lakeside and Caledine (but I think that there are a couple more).

Beach St actually ran further east (roughly through the playground next to the RFS shed) and looped around to Surf St. There was an open rubbish pit at the NE end which was frequented by feral cats. Shock and horror, we used to hunt those cats with rocks. I think Mike James may have also owned a slug gun. Returning to Lakeside, there was a swamp (which still periodically exists now) which was regularly visited by feral pigs at nighttime. That made any midnight journey to the loo a somewhat disturbing process. Best to hold on.

I don’t know the date when the cottage leases were resumed by (whomever) which meant that the cottages were no longer available. Some of the cottages were successfully “reclaimed” and moved to the village part of Tabourie. That is a story for others to tell. In turn, Fred James built the Castaway Units and we always stayed in Top North (overlooking the lake). I know that our parents enjoyed the “luxury” of hot water and electric heating. The sofa couches doubled as beds so we all had a place to sleep.

We all had different sets of friends. Most of them were from Sydney as the majority of Canberrans hadn’t discovered anything north of Batemans Bay (which suited us). I remember playing lots of touch footy with the Gillies boys (David, Robert and John) whose parents owned the substantial tongue of land which originally formed part of Tabourie Park. The original homestead eventually fell to termites and it was rebuilt by John. Peter and Gary Shelley (from Panania) were good friends and certainly gave us the numbers to play touch. Gees, they even had an aluminium dinghy with an outboard motor. That was as impressive as the modern e-bike (before they became both common and annoying).

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Margaret (9 years older than me) was friends with Barbara Abel. Her parents owned the cottage two houses to the west of the Castaways. In between, has a cottage owned by Bill Bailes called Gone Fishin'. Barb's younger brother Grant was mates with Colin (3 years older than me) and Phil (5 years older than me) was mates with Mike James. There was always something to do but we didn't have bikes so a walk to Half Tide Rocks (known as Stokes Island now) and Dermal was done for a purpose.

I do vaguely remember the construction of the Sunseekers Units (corner of Beach and Dermal) by the Turner's. Little did I suspect that I would end up owning their original cottage on the opposite side of the road (No 17 Beach St) which was built in the late 1950's on a much larger portion of land. There were no other surrounding cottages at that time. The Sunseekers were subsequently subdivided and sold off as standalone residences. From memory, this was done by locals Len and Annette Parsons who still reside on Dermal St while Deb & Sean Carpay (who live opposite me) have a copy of the original plans to the construction. I found out the Council didn't even get plans until 1963 hence my cottage had to be "redrawn" before I could do an addition to the very small 65 sqm floor area.

