

Tabourie Memories: My Tabourie

1955 to present time ... Kerry Smith

'I'm not camping Walter unless we have a bedroom for the children and wall to wall carpet' said Mum, whilst nursing her fourth child (me). Mum thought that would do the trick. Camping wasn't her style ... Dad had other ideas. Six months later, the summer of 1955, Dad had a tent (well 2 of them sewn together), with three bedrooms, kitchen and yes, wall to wall carpet. Our Tabourie adventure began.

A dear friend of his who worked with Dad had told him of this amazing place called Lake Tabourie. Fishing, beaches, lakes, beautiful hinterland with drop toilets and cold showers. Sounded perfect to Dad, Mum needed to be reassured. Needless to say, Mum grew to love Lake Tabourie ... "nothing to do and all day to do it in" was her favourite saying. We bathed in buckets of hot water, loved the drop toilets - more about those later and yes, the fishing and beaches were spectacular. We ran wild - except on Sundays when we went to Church in Ulladulla or Milton, dressed in our finest - then back to thongs and costumes.

Mr Gillies ran the camping area and we would store the carpet, ice chest etc in his large shed on his property across the lake when not in use. It was a labor intensive job erecting the tent, and often Dad along with my elder brother Robert would drive down before Christmas to put the tent up. Carpet laid, everything in order, and down we would drive, every Boxing Day for years to stay in our part of the world we thought of as paradise - Lake Tabourie. For the next 15 years we camped, observing the transition from drop toilets to flush! Those ensuing 15 years were exceptional.

Entertainment in the camping ground would consist of...at various times, a Circus, animal shows (horses, goats, elephants, monkeys), the Ambulance Chocolate Wheel, the CSSM with their daily gatherings and children occupying activities. Nothing though compared to the countless hours of surfing (we all rode boards or mats), snorkeling, fishing, boating, spin the bottle in the sand hills, the Burrill Lake theatre with no roof (considered a fire hazard), the holiday romances, parents playing cards at night, us kids running around so safely watching the shadows of people inside their tents as night closed in. We had floods, tragedy (drownings off the island tore the camping ground's heart apart), fires, injuries but all along, there was the comradeship of life in the camping ground. We had the jump tree in the lake and my brother once built a diving board from the sand hills that lined the beach end of the lake south side. They were huge and quite sheer...it was a great diving board. Milk, bread and ice delivered each morning with the truck and trailer driving up and down the rows of tents and vans. I remember the fragrant smell of fresh bread and the ladles of milk, straight from the cows with the cream so delicious. It was all fairy tale stuff for those of us from the city.

Dad went fishing every day (except Sunday). In the wooden 12 foot boat he built himself, with a mate and other boaties - out past the breakers they would venture and would bring in buckets of snapper, mowong, bream, red fish, garfish, flat head, Luderick etc etc. Prawning in the evening in the lake and pippie hunting at low tide. Beach worming was a skill I never mastered. Our best friends, the Normans, Gloria and Harry, children David, Ross, Craig and Marie were masters of it and they caught many whiting and salmon from the beach. We always camped close to the Normans and Mum and Dad and Harry and Gloria Norman would enjoy many a social evening together. There were us Smiths, the Normans, McCormicks, Harwicks, Huddleston's ... too many wonderful families to remember.

The lake was different each year...either opened or closed, it remained beautiful. I learnt to swim in the lake and was water safe at the age of two. My siblings, Robert, Pamela and Wendy were likewise, although dear Robert always said he ate so much fish whilst in Tabourie that he couldn't eat any more as an adult. I also must mention the time Robert waited for the men's toilet to be full of gentlemen when he then tossed a tuppenny burger down into the drop toilet - hmmm - those affected were not impressed! Sadly, my beloved brother has passed, but he remains in the lake!

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The Smith children grew up and the camping days merged into the caravan days for Mum and Dad. Mum and Dad continued to go to Tabourie and we, the children along with numerous friends, partners, wives and husbands would visit. Dad still went fishing but mainly for his most loved fish the Luderick. Off the island Dad would catch some beauties. Mum was extremely skilled at cooking the fish that would have been swimming an hour before. Her beer batter was quite famous along with Dad's home brew that knocked your head off and occasionally one of the shed's roofs at their home! Life continued at the Tabourie pace - 'nothing to do and all day to do it in'.

I brought my children to Tabourie. Their Dad and I would come down and would hire a cabin in the camping grounds. Our two boys Tien and Thai also fell in love with Tabourie. Prawning, leaping off the jump tree, surfing, swimming, fishing, diving off the island running wild in the dunes. Making numerous friends and bringing friends down to share the Tabourie experience. Some years would pass and change was my constant.

My love of Tabourie rebooted in 2003. I so loved and treasured the memories of my Tabourie youth, that I had to share with those I love. I brought Penny down. We stayed at Castaway apartments after an initial quick visit prior. It was November - stunning with the lake open and we embraced Tabourie wholeheartedly. So much so that some years later we bought the first block of land John Gillies sold and intend to build our forever home there at 24 Beach Street. The first time we camped on our land we promised the ancestors our resolve to care and be custodians not owners. To care and nurture.

The friendships made in Tabourie have been enduring. Since moving here permanently we love our south coast patch of paradise. Many an evening around an open fire enjoying fabulous vino and company. The star filled sky which mesmerized us as children and still does now. Shooting stars, satellites and wow, nothing like a south coast storm to wake you up! Watching the storm clouds as they approach, the crack of thunder. Oh, and did I mention the wind! Think the original indigenous meaning of Tabourie (spelt many ways over the years) was 'place of two winds' - north and south colliding. Yep we know it.

The animal and bird life. Love the cacophony of birds in the morning, it's a Tabourie ritual. Some species are truly beautiful songbirds whilst others sound like the nightmare of alarm clocks (the little Wattle bird for one). The Black cockatoos, the Osprey and of course the little Plover bird, it's nesting site on the open ever shifting beach sands near the entrance to the Lake. Protected but what a spot they choose to nest! It could be washed away at any moment!

The threat and impact of devastating fire. No one will forget 2020 - lest we forget. How everyone just banded together. Native animal feeding that was so well managed. The regrowth of the forest and the return of the birds! The kangaroos and wallabies returned and of course, the reptiles. The two pythons that I know about, one which habitually inhabits the men's toilet block much to the sheer terror of those that look up, live in harmony with the locals. The red belly blacks under the boardwalk pop out to sun themselves just to scare a few passersby.

When the lake is open - peppermint water. Stunning and so inviting. Fish aplenty.

I still snorkel, swim and I love my fishing. It is not always about catching a fish.

There is much to be grateful in life. Lake Tabourie is one such thing.

This is the Tabourie that is a constant. Over my 66 odd years the essence of Tabourie has endured.

What's Lake Tabourie like Myra? NOTHING TO DO, AND ALL DAY TO DO IT IN'. Mum was right.