

Tabourie Memories: Stephen's Family

Rod and Wayne Stephens and Jenny Denman (nee Stephens)

Rod Stephens

Richard (Dick) and Ron Stephens (my father and uncle) were on holidays at Tabourie Lake with their young families when they met Cliff Barnes from the NSW Govt Lands Department, who was inspecting South Coast camping grounds in view of upgrading them. After completing several formal interviews they were appointed to take over as joint managers of the park.

The shop on the park, which had been operated by Jack Robinson who owned a milk bar café in Ulladulla and only serviced the caravan park over the busy school holidays, was also up for tender. So, after being told about it I applied and after a meeting with a committee of local businesspeople, appointed by the government. I, Rod Stephens, was appointed lessee of the shop.

Preparations for the coming summer season were hectic. My wife Lesley and I had recently married and had to make many trips from Sydney to prepare the existing shop that needing renovating and stock up on supplies. We also purchased an old residence which was on the highway just south of the Tabourie Lake bridge.

Meanwhile, Dad and Ron were making extensive improvements to the park, including a new office building as well as taking a large amount of bookings for the Christmas holidays. Changes needed to be made to convert what was a run-down camping ground to a modern facility. Three new amenities blocks had been constructed the previous year by the Dept of Lands.

We were lucky to have my brother Wayne, who later converted the Tabourie Service Station on the Princes Highway into the Tucker Box Café and take-away, working together in partnership with me in the shop for the first season.



Old shop with a caravan we lived in over the holidays

The managers had to find the water table, so that spears could be sunk to provide water for the entire park. The water was pumped from the spears by an old Lister diesel motor which was housed in a pump shed down near the lake, up to two large reservoir tanks on the northern sand hill to gravity feed the entire park.

The road into the park was gravel, which was full of potholes by the end of the season.

Tabourie Memories: Stephen's Family

The old shop didn't have a phone, so communication with the outside world had to be done from the office phone, by winding the handle on the phone vigorously. Mrs or Mr Fred James from the village on the south side of the lake had the phone exchange in their shop, and they would transfer your call for you.

The manager's wives Anne and Jean Stephens worked tirelessly in the office taking bookings and handling all enquiries. The Ulladulla Ambulance Station provided a Chocolate wheel and caravan with all the prizes in it and operated every evening over the Christmas period, which was extremely popular. The lights from their van lit the entire area between the office and the shop.

Christmas 1965: On our first Christmas we organized a "Miss Tabourie Lake" competition. The night of judging we provided live music, with the manager Ron on piano accordion and myself playing electric guitar and vocals. The stage consisted of the back of the park garbage truck with electrical extension leads plugged into the office power.

Every Christmas holidays an organization called the CSSM (Children's Special Services Mission) erected a huge tent, similar to a circus tent (marquee) alongside the lake near the entrance to the park. They organised different activities for the children every day, which were great for the kids, to keep them happy. My sister Jenny and the older kids helped the organisers with the activities.

Ron Stephens and his family left in 1967 to relocate in Sydney after his father, my grandfather, who lived with them on the park, died in 1966.

Fish, in the lake, on the beach and outside, prawns in the lake and lobsters around the island, were abundant at certain times of the year. One night in pouring rain we were in the lake from midnight with a dinghy alongside us when the prawns began to run and we nearly filled the boat with approx. 50kg of prawns using scoop nets. We spent the rest of the night preparing and snap freezing them in small bags to eat and be used as bait. You can guess what breakfast consisted of Prawns on toast !

There were about four houses on the south side of the lake and three on the caravan park which was managed from the park. The southern cottages and one on the park were demolished in 1966 or 1967, the other two on the park housed the managers. After three seasons a new self-service shop with a milk bar and adjoining residence was approved and built throughout 1968 by a local Ulladulla builder Kevin Pollock. With the addition of a fuel pump and a tank for 500 ltrs of outboard fuel the park became much more modern and convenient for tourists. We opened the shop in October 1968.



The old shop 1966

Tabourie Memories: Stephen's Family



The new shop 1968

The old shop was demolished that year and our first child, Adam was born during that first Christmas holidays on the busiest day ever. We sold four ton of block ice, loaded at 5.00am from the ice works where the Ulladulla civic centre stands today, 90x20 bottle crates of milk loaded from the recently opened milk depot on the highway opposite Parsons Street, 6x50kgs of LPG gas per day were sold, filling small gas bottles for people to use for lights, cooking and for prawning etc, and the shop and milk bar were packed with customers stocking up from 7.00am until 8.00pm during the busy period. So you could say we were busy!

The one KM road into the park was sealed about 1969.

We were extremely lucky to have some wonderful people working on our staff over the Christmas and Easter holidays, including my Aunty Bub, (Dad's sister) who bought our house on the highway when we moved into the new residence on the park. She also worked during February and March quieter times. Betty Turley, who lived on the highway at Tabourie, was wonderful and worked long hours, mainly in the milk bar section. Then there was 18 year old Judy Halliday from Ulladulla, who I picked up each morning at 6.00am from in front of her house in St Vincent St where she waited with her mother, who collected her from the shop each afternoon. We were so lucky to have those three women as well as many other casual (4hr shifts) people. Ice, milk and flavoured milk were delivered around the entire park every morning.

Lesley worked long hours in the shop during the holiday season even though we had a new baby in the first year. The managers collected the garbage from bins around the park and cleaned the amenities blocks twice daily.

To fish outside, open boats no bigger than 14ft were towed from the pump shed at the entrance to the beach across the beach using the park tractor, then onto three inflatable rollers to the waters edge.

Some of the events (good and sad) that occurred during our time at the Tabourie Lake caravan park. A young boy about 9 years old drowned when Crampton Island was only accessible at low tide after being trapped on the island as the tide came in. (Alan Cresswell)

A very large school of tuna chasing bait fish came into the corner of the north beach near the island one afternoon, with plenty of sharks included in the feeding frenzy. We caught and relocated about 15 tunas into the lake hoping they grow and maybe breed? Never saw them again!!!

Tabourie Memories: Stephen's Family

The bushfires in October or November 1968 were devastating, with houses in Burrill Lake burnt down and the entire caravan park was alight from the highway to the lake. The people holidaying on the park helped our families, driving my truck and the park vehicles to the edge of the lake as well as the many other chores required to save the almost completed shop and other buildings on the park. I was in Sydney with my father to purchase a new trailer and stock for the shop when I received the message about the fires. We left everything in Sydney, and rushed back, ignoring the police road block south of Wandandian and drove through the fires arriving back at the park about 4.00pm. Thankfully, everyone was safe.

A young man, Terry Cooper, was badly mauled by a very large shark on the north beach on 21 October 1972. He was taken to Wollongong Hospital and had multiple stitches, but luckily, he survived.

Another member of the family was Jodie the kangaroo. She was very much loved by my two sisters Jenny and Millie as well as all the campers. At certain times of the year I dived for lobsters (mainly for recreation) with the help of my dad who stood on the rocks and collected them from me. We ate plenty and helped a local restaurant out as well!!!!

Lesley and I had a major scare in early 1972 when our then 4 year old son Adam went missing. We organized as many campers as possible to search along the edge of the lake as well as the entire park and the bush. About an hour later he was found asleep on some clothes in the laundry at the back of the shop residence, much to everyone's relief. Phew!

Approximately 1970 the Shoalhaven City Council took over the administration of all the caravan parks within the Shoalhaven. Our second child, Angela was born in 1972, so, after one more very busy summer season we sold the business to our cousins Jim and Gloria McGuinness from Sydney and they continued with the good work of managing the shop. At the same time, dad and family moved out to a property at Termeil.

Wayne Stephens

Wayne and his wife owned and ran the Tuckerbox during the 70's. He bought the derelict abandoned servo and built the shop beside it. The Wheatley family owned it before him and Wayne bought it from them for about \$20,000. Eventually running the business wore him and his family out and they sold it around 1979. Wayne built the Tuckerbox in stages and as the petrol business was not able to be revived, the shop acted as the main business, with takeaway food and supplies for the people at the camping ground. Wayne reports many interesting stories about his time at the Tuckerbox, including being held up at gun point twice and being eaten out of house and home by drunk bikies who slept outside the shop in the rain!



Tabourie Memories: Ron Stephens; Waynes Stephens and Jenny Denman (nee Stephens)

Tabourie Memories: Stephen's Family

Jenny Denman nee Stephens

Daughter of Dick and Anne Stephens who ran the caravan park in the 60's and 70's. For a while they co ran the park with Denis and Iris Rooney, but for about 10 years did it themselves. Their house was where the front cabins are now, and the shop a bit behind there. Jenny lived there with them, until they moved to Termeil and lived on a farm. They had a foster child Milly who lived with them until she was about 17.

Jenny talked about their pet kangaroo Jody, who came to them as a rescue, and had free reign of the park, visiting people in their tents and roaming free for many years. As time went on Jody started venturing into the bush and came out one day with a male partner. Interestingly this coincided with the time the Stephens family were leaving the park, and Jody was letting them know she would be OK!

Jenny's older brother Rod ran the shop with his wife Leslie, and he and Ron, one of Dick's brothers, used to play music together and organised lots of fun activities in the park.

