

## From the archives of South Maroubra Surf Club

### Part 4. Mass rescues, the first Nippers, new clubhouse plans, the first female member of the surf club and a terrible Sydney disaster. By Bob Wurth.

Sunday 18 December 1966 was a day of mass rescues at both ends of Maroubra beach. The whole length of the beach was scattered with hazardous sandbanks and rips all day. Before noon the southern patrol closed South Maroubra beach for the day after some serious rescues and it offered the Maroubra patrol assistance because most of the South Maroubra crowd had moved north. It was a very hot day and the crowd at Maroubra was enormous. Patrol captain Barry Rodgers and his patrol were under pressure and they welcomed the extra hands. South Maroubra took the southern side of the flags in front of the Maroubra dressing sheds while the Maroubra patrol took the northern side. The swimming area was on a wide but highly unstable sandbank which all day treacherously caved in at the edges, creating much chaos. There were no deaths, but it was close.

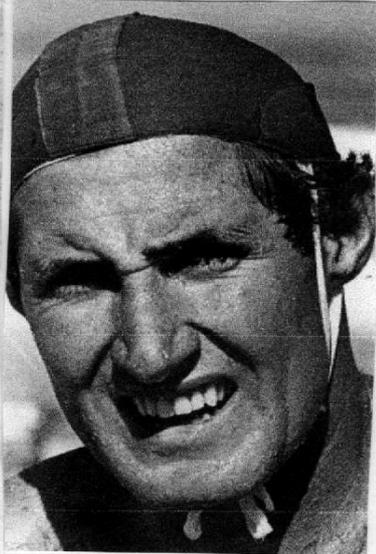
# Lifesavers drag 50 out in mass rescue

Lifesavers rescued more than 70 people at Maroubra yesterday.  
19/12/1966.

**THEY** brought nearly 50 of the people ashore in a mass rescue after two strong, sudden rips. The first rip, just after 1 p.m., swept about 15 surfers out. Before lifesavers rescued all the 15, another rip carried more than 30 people out. Twenty-five lifesavers manned five reels in the mass rescue. The vice-captain of the Maroubra patrol, Barry Rogers, 25, said: "We were extremely lucky that the afternoon patrol was just coming on and that South Maroubra had closed their section of the beach about half an hour earlier. "Otherwise we wouldn't have had anywhere near enough men to cope." Mr. Rogers said a combination of tides, a treacherous bottom with many big holes, and a dangerous rip made the day the busiest for two years. In an incident-packed day at Sydney's beaches:

- A rip swept 11 bathers 150 yards out to sea at North Curl Curl before lifesavers rescued them.
- At North Narrabeen 50 lifesavers and members of the public formed a human chain after eight people—two distressed swimmers and their rescuers—got into difficulties.
- Tamarama lifesavers made 20 rescues—although the beach was officially closed most of the day.
- A \$1300 surfboat belonging to the South Maroubra club was wrecked when a dumper smashed it on a sandbank.
- At Freshwater a boat and a surf ski struggled through heavy seas to help a surfer about 400 yards out to sea.

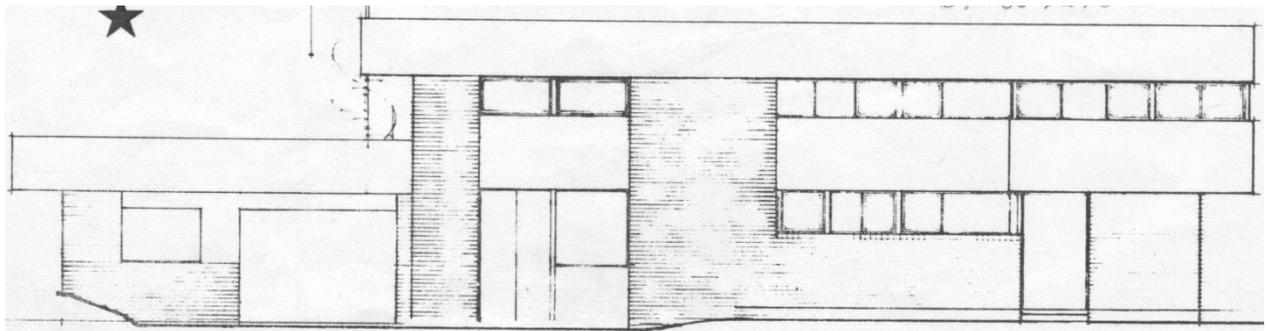
Many beaches yesterday reported their biggest crowds this summer. Bondi had the biggest crowd yesterday, estimated by surf officials to be about 35,000. Other beaches which reported big crowds were Maroubra (30,000), Coogee (10,000) and Queenscliff (10,000). At Maroubra the water was cleared for 30 minutes when a lifesaver reported seeing a shark cruising offshore.



Ken Arthur was one of the South Maroubra lads up north that day. He recalls pounding out in a belt and taking hold of an unconscious girl, aged about 13. She was barely floating in the surf. Ken brought her back to the beach: "I gave her mouth to mouth resuscitation and she came around before too long. It was all so hectic that day, but we held our heads together and we mostly managed to keep the crowd back from the rips..." Potential disaster was on the card all day long.



South Maroubra that season saw the founding of the South Maroubra Nippers, originally for boys under 12. It was called the South Maroubra Juvenile Surf Club. The club's committee elected John Dynan as president-organiser and Geoff Starkey as secretary. Geoff was already secretary of the surf club. Soon John became a part of the first Sydney branch committee. The Rutherford family of South Maroubra were among the founding members and activities mostly were run by parents of the boys, long before girls became eligible to join the ranks. The Nipper movement from 1966 took off and since has grown exponentially.



During the 1966-67 season the decision was taken to build a new surf clubhouse at South Maroubra. (early sketch above). Younger members of the club's management committee had almost come to blows with their friend and admired president, John Dynan, whose favourite saying was 'Hasten slowly!' The young guns wanted action and were particularly vocal at building committee meetings about the need for swift action. Randwick Council health and building officer and club member Paul Duffy ran the committee with John Dynan. What we didn't realise at first was that 'Have a Chat' behind the scenes was quietly locking in promises of money, loans, land and building materials. Of course the club couldn't just plonk a building on the sandhills at South Maroubra. The whole length of the sanddunes had to be researched by conservationists, experts from the University of NSW and the Lands Department, and both sandhills and vegetation had to be restored and conserved for the future, blending in with the new clubhouse. And it all happened remarkably well.

The club's building committee originally began with the idea of a single storey building. Stage One would cost \$22,000 in the money of the day. Adequate provision would be made for the construction of Stage Two, bringing the final cost to \$35,000... or so the club thought. Stage One would cater for a total active membership of 150 and include toilets, showers, a locker room, kitchen, first aid centre, storage hall and recreation hall. On the northern side of the building would be a large outdoor barbeque area, with a view over the beach. A spiral staircase led to the roof with its spectacular view in every direction. Clearly both stages had to be combined in the one construction and the cost blew out to \$70,000 (that's about \$873,000 now). The club was able to save a great deal of money by employing its own foreman, Bill Dihm, so that the club, not a company, hired all tradesmen and did the sub-contracting. Towards the end of the 1966-67 season Randwick Council agreed to subsidise the new building with a loan over five years. The club was required to pay back the

bank interest only. But of course Mauri Doyle, local manager of the Rural Bank, was always there to extend a loan. And when a group of lads from the club wanted to take a cruise to Japan and back, but had insufficient funds, Maurie always had a smile on his face with the welcome, *'Come in boys! How much can I help you with?'*



**Did South Maroubra Surf Club have women members as early as 1967?**

Well, the club that year was all male with just one exception. And that exception was Jan Brame (pictured left), who was made an honorary member of the surf club in October 1967 for her administrative assistance to the club. Jan married Greg Goddard (pictured right) and they now live on the NSW south coast. Among other things Jan assisted with the production of the 'South Maroubra Newsletter' distributed to members.



Olympian kayak medallists and surf ski champions Dennis Green and Barry Stuart joined South Maroubra surf club in the 'sixties. Dennis won the Australian single ski title at the national championships at Perth for South Maroubra with Dennis and Barry teaming up to finish close second in the double ski title the same day. The Stuart and Green pair also had seven different carnival wins in the 1966-67 season and won the national double ski title at the Aussies in South Australia, among numerous other successes. Formerly from the Maroubra club, Green and Stuart were an amazing paddling duo. Dennis Green competed in five Olympic Games in his kayak in Melbourne in 1956, while Barry Stuart competed in four Olympic Games.



*South Maroubra's boat 'Bill Lucas' is dumped at Coogee. Rower Lindsay St Leon is hurt, knocked unconscious. From left are Dennis Pender, Max Murphy, skipper Bob Byrne and Ian Jordan calling for help. Below, right, Jim Jackson at South Maroubra with the ultra-heavy old surf ski that was smashed in two (by a friend!)*



"The *Bill Lucas* surfboat was Bombhead's pride and joy" according to boatie Jim (Jet) Jackson referring to our first boat captain Brian Chenhall. Jet said Brian had the boat built by a mate who built small boats, but never a surfboat. The only good things about the boat, according to Jet, were the toilet seats: "You could slide a lot better on them and we didn't have to wear the footy shorts with chamois in the backside of them and smeared with Vaseline. The boat had a big wide tuck and a large high bow. When we got onto a wave on the way in, instead of the tuck setting down in the wave like a normal surf boat, the *Bill Lucas* would sit up high and be pushed all over the place, which made it very hard for the sweep to handle - almost impossible in fact.

"The bow was made big so that we could crash through the waves on the way out and not take water; a great idea for something with a 200 horse power motor, but not for a boat with four rowers. When the wind was blowing [and that was every day] the bow acted like a sail and blew the boat all over the place. When we trained on Botany Bay I'm sure some nights we would set out for Bare Island and end up over near the airport. So to fix all this Bombhead had the boat sent back to his boat builder mate and had the tuck and bow cut down to normal size. It was never a good boat. Looking back I give full marks to Bombhead for having a go at something new, but at the time maybe we did not look at it like that. The seats I think were Chicka's idea and it was not long after that nearly all clubs had the toilet seats in their boats, but nothing to flush', Jet added.

In the first decade the South Maroubra club made valiant attempts in march past competition at carnivals. Bob Spankie (pictured below with hat) often carried the club's banner. Bob had a particular swagger when carrying the banner which made the rabble of marchers cobbled together behind him snigger and laugh.



Most of the club members thought there were far more exciting things to do than march up and down on the hot sand. Our team proudly comprised failed sportsmen, no-hopers, fill-ins and some who had never marched before. Bob Spankie was club captain in the 1966-67 and 1967-68 seasons. He was a tireless worker for the club. He was the ever suffering flag bearer and had a rather unusual marching gait. For some years in the sixties his wobbling butt often brought titters, jibes and tears from the crude infidels marching behind. Then in one competition at Coogee one of the team carrying the reel staggered and lost his grip on the handle. Down came the reel, jerking Bob to a halt, while the South Maroubra heroes marching up from behind stumbled into the fallen reel and couldn't contain their laughter. The big crowd at the Coogee carnival roared laughing. The only people on the beach that day not laughing were the white clad scowling officials who hastened to the scene of disaster. "You are a disgrace to the movement and you'll never march again!" one senior official shouted to the delight of the marchers, who quickly gathered up their reel and banner and bolted for the Oceanic Hotel across the road. In his annual club captain's report for the 1967-68 season Bob Spankie commented: "Our patrol operations were regular and efficient and it's expected that this policy will continue. The performance of our club at carnivals was *not* outstanding." To put it mildly, but we did well elsewhere.

Paul White, (pictured above second from right), who took over from Bob Spankie as march past instructor (among Paul's many club roles). Bob wrote in the 1967-68 season's annual report: "Well the past season wasn't as successful as I had hoped. I suppose one can't win them all. I was bitterly disappointed with the position at a few carnivals, where a few of our members declined to give the march past event the necessary support it needs." Ouch! As Paul pointed out, the growth of the club's membership had been impressive. Jeff Ludlow (above right) that season dominated the club results, especially in the senior surf and belt races.



There were on 45 surf rescues in the 1967-68 season. Over 100 swimmers had been rescued annually for years. With more lifesavers and better equipment, rescue numbers gradually declined. But first aid cases treated, especially by our young first aid officer Barry Gobbe (pictured) soared to a high of 124 cases in 1967-68. Glass left on the beach was the main problem. Later Barry Gobbe became an ambulance man and an intensive care paramedic with NSW Ambulance. He's chairman of the Granville Train Disaster Association and worked at Granville on the day of the disaster which killed 84 passengers and injured 213 others when a train brought down the Bold Street overhead bridge. Also present that day at Granville was the writer.