

MACKAY WATER SKI CLUB **INCORPORATED**



The Ski club
(photo taken from the tiger moth after 1988)

Some of the Story..... **(Plenty more stories around,** **just ask!!)** **The Beginning**

The original owner of the land where the Ski Club is, was Mr John Newman (dec'd – 2009) his wife and two children, from Newman's Road, Marian.

Mr Newman's passing gave me the inspiration to put his generosity in the spotlight. Also in that spotlight are the skiers and families that developed friendships and set in place the start of a great club. Hard work, commitment and family values have grown so that all can enjoy the great venue that many members do now.

Development of skiing area was commenced in approximately 1958. The area that the Mackay Water Ski Club is on now is called Newman's Reach and was open to the public. Skiers used it regularly from this time. (they always left a mess) A strong club that also used to use it for many years was the Mackay Power Boat Club (MPBC). Mr John Newman always opened the property which was on his cane farm.

Christmas 1974 John's house was broken into while he was on holidays. Also on ANZAC day 1975 someone stole a battery out of one of John's tractors. John thought it was a skier and as the road only went to a farm. He thought if he closed the skiing area, nobody would need to go down there. So John wired the gate shut after this. No access anymore.

At the same time the MPBC had a decline in numbers so they suggested they combine with some skiers and make it a POWER BOAT & SKI CLUB (MPBSC). On July 9, 1975 with over 30 people in attendance, the first special meeting took place at the Leichardt Hotel. After this meeting with Mr John Newman it was decided they could run as a club as long as the front gate was kept locked and used by *members only*. Keeping in mind here that Mr John Newman never owned a boat, never skied, had no interest in the water. *But was one of life's Gentlemen.*

Some of the original people that attended this meeting still own and use their same boats to this day. Well their families are grown up now, so they have their children, grand children and great grand children using them.



Pearce Family Boat



Kay Family Boat

T.F. Woollam & Son Builders, Mackay donated a building (our current clubhouse) to the Mackay Power Boat and Ski Club back in May 1978. With the agreement that the building was completely dismantled and taken away in one weekend. The building was being used as a school building at St Mary's Primary School, Mackay. It was originally a two storey building. All framework was shortened, and then it had to be stored. It took **one huge** working bee, and many, many volunteers to dismantle, transport. And then reconstruct it. Mr John Newman was approached and okayed erection for the clubhouse and toilet block on his land in May 1978. (remember there was no lease yet). All work and activities were done with John Newman on a Hand Shake and Gentlemen's Agreement.



The Clubhouse

In July 1986 the club became an Incorporated body registered as we are today "MACKAY WATER SKI CLUB INC.", taking over from the Mackay Power Boat and Ski Club.

When Mr John Newman sold his farm to Mr Simon Matsen in 1988 he had the 99 Year Lease set up as we know it today. This lease expires on the 10th May, 2087.

Mr John Newman didn't want payment, but there had to be a monetary value set on the lease to make the transaction legal. So the annual payment was set at \$1.00 per year. Today the lease payment still stands at \$1.00 per year.

Our grounds would have to be the most valuable, most wanted block, for the cheapest dollar changeover ever. Mackay Water Ski Club Inc. is a very fortunate club.....

The club has seen two changes of ownership since John. The second owner was Mr Simon Matsen, who lived in the family home on the bank of the river, and the current owners of the property and lease are Mr Rex and Mrs Andrea Stroppiana, that live in their family home across from the Ski Club.

The pine trees in the photo on front page were planted by Simon Matsen, after 1988.

You may have wondered why the clubhouse has railings around the building. They were put on there to keep the cattle out of the clubhouse, along with a grid at the front gate. Mr Newman had cattle grazing in the club grounds. You can imagine the mess each weekend in the clubhouse from the cattle enjoying the shade inside the club. And of course having no power there, it was a mammoth task when you camped to make your way to the club house to the toilet in the dark without getting bogged.

Hot water to have a shower and freshen up was solved by installing a Donkey Boiler out the side. Someone had to get the timber (when there was some there) and remember to stoke the fire before bath time. A roof was built over the boiler to keep the rain off, but then it was hard to find dry timber. Thank you to Gas Hot Water.....

Electricity wasn't put through to the club until about 1996-1997. Extra power boxes have been put in over the past years to make it easier to access for all members. Before that the members that camped had to rough it, or bring along their loud and rattley generators. No peace and quiet then, especially if a few people had some late nights.

Extensions were made to the clubhouse to include extra showers and a disabled/family shower and toilet about 5 years ago. A Pressure pump was installed so at busy times the water maintains a pretty even flow, and gas heater to help keep up to the demand.

Busy times at the Ski Club will always see an interruption to these facilities of some sort. It is a popular place during holiday periods. *“It is camping.....”*
Continuing maintenance to our clubhouse keeps it a very useable facility.
Numbers have always been fairly big using the Ski Club, it was nothing to see boats line both sides of the river. Especially before the second stage of bank(downriver) was built.

NO DOGS The story behind this is that members took a lot, and some large dogs to the river, so you can imagine the complications. Then one night one small dog relieved itself into a lady’s handbag, which was the straw that broke the camel’s back!!
The only dog that attended the ski club was Mr John Newman’s dog. When he heard or saw a boat going past, he’d join the campers for the weekend. Regular campers knew him as “CYCLONE”, until John was asked his real name, and it was revealed he was “**JACK**”.

THE FLOODS

Floods have changed the bank several times and will continue to do so. The club has been fortunate, as it has been many years since that sort of water has come down the river and left such damage. During the 1980’s flood waters regularly ran through the clubhouse, usually just high enough to go up over the toilet bowl height. Sometimes 3 times a year. At other times up to the concrete block at the top of the building. Once seen by John Newman only 2 foot of the apex of the roof was showing. Or course it was hard to get there to see as everywhere else, including the roads to the Ski Club were flooded. The owners that live along Newman’s Road and in that area have seen and told some great stories about the river in flood. One story Keith and Val Pearce often tell is about the time it was that high, that their caravan was stuck in one of the trees. Mr John Newman went down and lassoed it out of the tree while still afloat and towed it to high ground.



Silt left on top bank



Flood debris left in clubhouse



Debris caught on sleepers



Depth of Silt



The river rising.....



A pump borrowed from local farmer to wash away deep silt left by a flood.

When the tank was set up and water was hooked up to the club, the first pump on the waters' edge was a petrol driven pump. Someone always had to remember to take fuel and start it. The floods drowned each pump several times, and took a couple away. Theories of how to build a cover over the pump that would hold a bubble of air around it to stop it getting wet bought out some Einstein Theories... *Solution* – submersible pump!

THE DROUGHT



The Old boat ramp(front of clubhouse)



Part of original bank construction

Of course we had some very dry times as well.

That is the old boat ramp pictured above and below. This old ramp was a nightmare to any learners. It actually had two kinks in it on the way down. And showed us who the real champs were with reversing boats and trailers down the ramp. One person had a tow ball on the front of his car, and used to push his boat down. Got it right all the time.

The picture below was one taken in 1992, and things got a lot worse after that. There wasn't enough water for Boats to be launched in the river. Weed took over the water. Each time the water level was down, members got out the chainsaws, etc., cutting back trees or logs, trying to reduce the number of obstacles sticking up along the edges. It was quite a surprise to see what was under the water, even in the middle !!!!!

The Daily Mercury, Tuesday, November 10, 1992—3

Mackay region water crisis



THE water level at Marian weir has dropped about 30 cm below the end of the boat ramp, making life difficult for skiers. Marian weir is holding 64 per cent of capacity.

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Levels drop at weirs, dam

THE Mackay region water shortage is not only affecting farmers and graziers, waterskiers are having problems too.

The water level at Marian weir has dropped about 30 cm below the end of the boat ramp making it difficult to get boats in and almost impossible to get them out.

The Mackay waterski club used the weir on Saturday.

A club spokesperson said several people had to help lift boats out of the water at the end of the day.

Water Resources Commission senior technical officer Mr Gary Luck said Marian weir was currently holding 64 per cent of capacity and water was about 1.5 metres below the concrete spillway.

Kinchant Dam was closed to skiers on September 2.

The Water Resources Commission had no authority to ban skiing on Marian weir, Mr Luck said.

"We can make a recommendation but they don't have to listen

to us," he said.

All farmers in the Marian area were restricted to using 50 per cent of previous water allocations.

"Basically we have promised to provide 50 per cent of their allocations and some people are saving it for next month, some have used it all already and some will be at that stage soon," Mr Luck said.

Mirani weir is holding 40 per cent of capacity and Dumbleton is holding 50 per cent.

We haven't seen this situation for a few years now, since the Teemburra Dam has gone in. Lucky the club sits between there and Dumbleton Weir- the town water supply for Mackay. Members took advantage of the drought in the river that year and went ahead and constructed the new and current boat ramp around Christmas and New Year in 1992.



There was a water bag on the wall at Mirani Weir, now and then the water authorities would release some water over night for the farmers to irrigate or for town water top up. However, as a lot of us do often, leave our boats in overnight. One occasion when this happened two boats, “*Hassle*”- Ron SAO Kay & “*Flying Hunter*”- Mike Soul were washed away. They were stopped by trees on the bank only 200 metres from the top of the weir wall.

NEVER ENDING BATTLE

Countless efforts have been completed to maintain the bank areas for skiing and access. Some seemed unconventional but it was a case of what materials they had, they had to work with, along with a committed band of helpers.

As more members joined there were a lot more ideas and access to a lot more materials, and machines donated, or hired at mates rates.

Some situations were hairy moments; you could say a Workplace Health and Safety nightmare. Lucky there was none there, and no one was hurt. Including daring moments of machines going downhill, realizing you have no brakes. Then by the power of, “*who knows what*”, it stops near the edge. Or the machine that wanted to lay down for a sleep!

Varying materials including timber railway sleepers, rubber conveyor belt, large timber log centres, tyres, bridge girders and decking, lengths of railway line, steel lengths, stairs, steel sheeting, erosion matting, concrete, loads of rock, gravel, you name it, it's been used, tried or thought about. ***The power of water is phenomenal!***

Working bees were more a social weekend that all enjoyed. And when the weekend was over, people had completed some massive construction works. Since my and my family's involvement in the club we have developed some great friendships and bonds. Children completed levels of work at the Ski Club that would never be achieved at home. They loved it, laying turf off knee boards, moving sprinklers (and playing in them) spreading sand, painting, it was made fun. They went home worn out!!! Over the years, many hours, members, volunteers, friends, family, and businesses have put an extraordinary amount of hours and donations into making the club what it is today.

All of this effort is greatly appreciated – THANK YOU

The previous and current club never always had money accessible. Some years were run on pure donations, and some members paying years in advance for membership so that bills could be paid and activities could be covered. A non profit club runs on a fine line.



Transport and Cranes donated for use



Machines and materials donated – Lots of Foremen



The club has been involved in conducting Race weekends, including Lane Racing, Drag Racing and Pursuit Racing., even having hosting Triathlons.

These weekends were held with clubs from Townsville, Ayr, Glenden, Emerald, Proserpine, Gladstone and Rockhampton -To name a few. Catering was offered, along with a licensed bar and a DJ (Jungle Jim was a regular). They were a great get together, socially and competitively with some colourful characters. It was also a great fund raising event for our club.

Again the kids got involved skiing, making burgers, playing shop, but they never seemed to be around much when it came to clean up time.

Trophies were usually made at someone's house with timber, medallions and a label making machine. Tried spending money on bought trophies. It was the thrill of the prize, not the value. And then we could afford to give every child a trophy. And most adults too. Many of the members travelled to compete in the Northern Region Race Meetings, and further afield. All tried to participate where possible to help each club with their fund raising event, and of course to socialise.



Race weekend in Rockhampton.



Trophies

Water Ski displays were also a part of the activities that the club was involved in. For many years the club was invited to put on a display for the Sugartime festival in Mackay. The show was often in the Pioneer River along River Street in the salt water. Several shows were presented at the club grounds at Marian as a part of a festival as well.

Most of the ski shows were August or September, so guess when the training was done - in winter... Members all had an input into the costumes that were designed and how each display was presented. Towers, acrobatics, fun presentations, clowns, skiing bath tubs and bikes, ladders and chairs, were all part of the show. Adults and all the kids were involved. Some crazy people even jumped off the Sydney Street Bridge and barefooted away!!



The Street Parade was always a lot of fun, boats, cars, lollies, water pistols, and kids would ride skates or roller blades behind the boat while hanging onto a rope.



1998



Rob & Janelle's Boat

Competitions in many forms of "Water Skiing" have seen a number of members be involved in, and do exceptionally well with: bare footing, slalom, speed skiing, wakeboarding, disabled slalom and jump. Congratulations to those people and encouragement to those up and coming competitors.

Some members of the club have been assisting the Sporting Wheelies and Disabled Association for around 14 Years now. They come and try disabled water ski days started at Kinchant Dam. Then a drought gave us the inspiration to move to the Ski Club, and so twice a year in summer (when weather permits) we have a great day.



Thank you!



Christmas Party and New Years Eve Party are always a great night. Santa always makes time in his busy schedule to arrive and visit all the kids. Of course the Fancy Dress each New Years Eve keeps the Opportunity shops busy. Some past years have been extraordinary, again joining in on some daredevil activities. You can't play and ski hard and not have some injuries. Nearly all injuries were self inflicted and not serious.



There have been many happy events, and joyous occasions, and there have been some very sad times. One such occasion was the loss of someone very dear to many members. The large silver palm growing in front of the club is a reminder of that beautiful person. This palm has become a great haven for many birds nesting...



Wildlife is a part of the area there, funny and quite scary events have come up. Catfish are abundant, if planned right; you can get a whole heap of them around someone in the water by throwing some bread in. There has been frogs and rats race out of toilets, snakes and possums watching you have a shower, or on the throne. Bandicoots, possums and scrub turkeys landing on your roof, or eating the only loaf of bread you took camping. Many a turtle has been caught and had to be taken to school for show and tell, then drive back the next day to release it. Small fish and eels are a real thrill to catch. Peacefulness of the morning or late afternoon when all is still, you can see a platypus bobbing around.



The club has seen many changes over the years, including getting into the swing of technology. It had to happen one day. No matter how advanced we get, let's not go past the camping and skiing side of why the Mackay Water Ski Club Inc., exists. And let the kids get muddy and stay healthy!!!! **SAY GIDDAY TO EVERYONE**

As we all know, it takes many hours and people to maintain what we have now. If every member gets in and helps a little, and works together the huge task that it is can be shared around.

And remember no one gets paid.

Everyone pays to have the privilege to be a member.

Peace, Happiness & Health be with everyone... Composed by Janelle White–Nov2009



This isn't the end, this is only the beginning.....