

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PORT STEPHENS YACHT CLUB LTD

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Port Stephens Yacht Squadron was formed in March 1971 after a number of years of informal cruising and racing from Soldiers Point/Salamander Bay as the Soldiers Point Yacht Club. The members built the existing clubhouse in Ridgeway Ave and the Squadron became incorporated in 1996, with the addition of a full liquor licence. In 2003 the Squadron changed its name to Club, to better reflect its activities in the sporting community.

Initially racing was rather random and races were held about once every three months, but after the first year racing became more frequent, to fortnightly. Racing was a friendly affair, with starts on the water, and yachts taking their own times. This soon became formalised with handicap starts, yachts starting some minutes before the scratch (fastest) boat, which would often also become the start boat. Early races started off Kangaroo Point, and where possible the time was shown on large boards changed every minute. This also meant laying at least one buoy to mark the outer end of the start line. Courses were definitely not Olympic. Racing courses have been registered since 1974.

Two years after formation the decision was made to join the NSWYA. To sail in YA sponsored events in other clubs, and to hold events in which other clubs could participate, it was necessary to have a class sail number or a yacht club sail number granted by YA. It was mandatory that the club be a member of YA. Once a member of YA it became possible to hold regattas and sailing championships. Thus the TYA regatta during the October long weekend was initiated in 1977 and this has been a strong contributor to club funds. The first regatta was held from a tent below the present clubhouse. Results took six people two hours to calculate by hand. Results are now calculated by computer using the international SAIL100 system.

RL24, Boomerang and other Australian championships have been hosted, as well as the International 12sm Canoe Worlds and Pacific Rim Sister City regattas. The Squadron has hosted ocean races from Sydney and Lake Macquarie, but these have tended to be one-off events in spite the high hopes of the initial organisers. During the bicentennial year a novelty race was organised to Nelson Bay with the members of the Newcastle Triathlon Club who then ran to the top of Gan Gan Hill and back.

Members have achieved racing fame in their own right. Tim Brown won the Magnum State Titles on Lake Illawarra, and representing the Squadron, John Glease won the first Hardy Challenge in Sydney Harbour. Further afield, Ross Sheldon was a regular entrant in the Lord Howe Island Race and Peter Meguyer sailed *Invader* in the 1985 Sydney to Hobart. More recently, Gerard and Harmke Nymeyer circumnavigated the world in *Distant Drums* and both the Stones and Bowdens completed the Matthew Flinders Bicentennial Circumnavigation of Australia in 2003.

Cruising tends to be an individual affair and is very difficult to cater for members' tastes. Initially a cruise was organised about once a month and often two or three crews get together and decide to sail somewhere together. Many yachts have done extensive coastal cruising to the Whitsundays, Tasmania and points in between. The most common local cruise is under motor up the Myall River. Informal groups have gone to the Myall Lakes at least twice a year since the club was formed. In the early days navigation marks were almost non-existent and this led to the production of Squadron charts. The charts of the lakes show the six foot contour (at drought level) as no vessel with a draft exceeding six feet can navigate the river between Tea Gardens and Tamboi. A vessel with a draft of less than three feet can navigate the river at any tide. The Tea Gardens Bridge is another hazard, with a clearance of about 10.8m at MLWS.

Offshore cruises have been regularly organised to Broughton Island, Newcastle and Forster. There are many interesting places to visit within the Port including Fame Cove, North Arm Cove, Tahlee, Karuah, Tanilba, Lemon Tree Passage and Tilligerry Creek. Sandy beaches are at Salamander Bay, Shoal Bay, Dutchies, Nelson Bay, Jimmies Beach, and Pig Station Beach and if you really want to get away from it all there is Corrie Island and Barnes Rocks. There has usually been one successful cruise in company each year.