

ITHACA: IT'S OUR TRUE BLUE ROYAL

By LAMBLE S

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By STEPHEN LAMBLE LIKE several other Sunshine Coast surf clubs, Ithaca at Bulcock Beach, Caloundra, originated from a Brisbane swimming club. But unlike any other club in the region, Ithaca is not affiliated with Surf Life Saving Queensland and is a member of the Queensland branch of the Royal Life Saving Society.

A "still water" club rather than a surf club, Ithaca patrols a section of Pumicestone Passage from the Caloundra Bar to Military Jetty where there can be dangerous currents. A club with a quirky history, the inaugural meeting was at Ithaca pool in Caxton Street, Paddington, in February 1950 but members did not start patrols at Caloundra until 1957. Treasurer Jim McClelland has been researching Ithaca's history and he said it was started by a group of men and known at first as Ithaca Life Saving Club but a female volunteer soon changed that.

"One of the volunteers in the State head office of Royal Life was a member of the Neptunes Ladies Life Saving Club. When she registered the name with Royal Life she put it down as Ithaca Ladies Life Saving Club," he said.

"It appears it could have been an administrative foul up. But from that alleged foul up, before I joined (in 1971), it was most definitely always referred to at the Ithaca Ladies Life Saving Club. 'I know some of the equipment was very clearly marked "Ithaca Ladies Life Saving Club'.

"In the early 1960s, females did most of the patrolling." Separate male and female patrols began in 1968 but the sexes were till segregated, with men patrolling one weekend and women the next. Mixed patrols on the same weekends were finally allowed in 1973 when separate male and female dormitories were built in the clubhouse and arrangements made for a chaperon to be present at all times.

"We still have chaperons. I know it is an old term but we most definitely still have them," Mr McClelland said. Today's Ithaca members stay in a modern clubhouse during their weekend patrols. It was opened in 1989 after help from Caloundra Council and a \$30,000 contribution from the club.

It is a far cry from the first ""clubhouse", which was a tent on the beach, and a vast improvement on other predecessors – an old house near the present site of Caloundra Coast Guard headquarters and an old boat shed.

Today Ithaca has about 30 members, 15 of whom are active patrol members. About 90 percent of members still live in Brisbane and travel to Caloundra for weekends. It is the only Royal Life Saving Society club patrolling a beach north of Brisbane.

Although Ithaca is not part of Surf Life Saving Queensland, it has a close relationship with the organisation, using compatible rescue equipment and joining Surf's radio network. It also shares a strong historical link.

That link is through Frank Venning, the first lessee of the Ithaca pool in Brisbane and the man credited with founding life saving in Australia.

In 1819 the Swimmers Life Saving Society was formed in Britain with the idea of saving lives by teaching swimming, rescue and resuscitation. Six members of the society toured the United Kingdom teaching their skills at schools and to emergency services. Frank Venning was one of the six. He arrived in Western Australia in 1899 and established the life saving movement in Perth.

In 1908 Venning went back to Britain to compete in diving events the London Olympic Games. Later that year he came back to Australia and based himself in Brisbane from where he travelled Queensland, setting up swimming, life saving and surf life saving clubs as far north as Cairns. Mr Venning's son Joe later leased the Ithaca pool in Paddington.

"The whole Venning family has been involved in the club from the last century up until now," Mr McClelland said.

Caption: PICS OF THE OLD AND NEW CLUBHOUSES AT ITHACA AND MEMBERS SCOTT CONWAY AND SALINA CURRIE

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