



Memories shared at Cooinda's 50th celebration

Going down to Cooinda as a sailing instructor and introducing lots of campers to the art of sailing and tipping their boats safely.

Spending 24 hours alone on Cooinda Island. That time gave me a fantastic opportunity to reflect on myself, my life and my time at camp. My only concern was getting bitten by a snake and no body would find me. So I stomped my feet everywhere to scare those naughty snakes away!

My first camp-fire story at the end of camp, I'll never forget it – so emotional and magical. Some of the best friends I've ever made. My lifelong family. [Karen]

Paddling across to the island in 2009 with a group of leaders on New Year's Day and being tracked by a pod of dolphins. The excitement of circumnavigating Lake King via Nicholson River in the late 80's. [Louisa]

Leading a patrol to Wellington and then seeing almost every member of that patrol go on to lead at Cooinda and my co-leader to become part of the committee. [Geoff]

Total freedom with 12 people I've never spent 5 minutes with. Spending the week with these mates was the best.

The moments of absolute stillness on site, usually shared with a pelican or a dolphin or a roo.....

The water pistol fight where, after a series of retribution / reverse fights, most of the camp was involved and all were soaked. On a 40 degrees day, the best kind of activity.

I love every part of the experience at Cooinda! One of the remarkable ones was – we slept on the beach overnight, the sky with sparkly stars and really beautiful, it was so quiet and we enjoyed the sounds of the waves from the lake. I saw my first shooting star ever in my life (although I missed two before the one I saw). The next morning I was woken up by a noise and just when I opened my eyes I saw the beautiful beautiful sun rising in the pink and purple sky, it was so unforgettable! [Emma]

My first and final night ceremony, the legend of Wowasa and the silent lantern walk along the beach. 1985

So many lantern walks and fireside stories.

Learning to sail on the front beach – nearly took a mirror into the stationery launch with Janine.

Circle work in a mirror.

Camping on 90 mile beach in flimsy canvas tents in torrential rain – not a wink of sleep! 1982

Pat singing 'Hey Jude' in the hall and coaxing everybody into a mosh-pit style dance and singing frenzy. Circa 1988

Camping on ninety-mile beach, sand below, stars above, and waves crashing in to shore to lull us to sleep. 1984?

1963-1965: Long expeditions, long kayaking trips. Kayaking to Spermwhale Head for last night celebrations. Red rattler trains from Flinders Street.

Sailing, capsizing, flying....Seeing one of the first campers I'd lead as 12 year olds become 18, be in the Narguns and then as new patrol leaders. Camping under a beautiful tree at Storm Point, watching the stars, swimming, Frisbee, tarp, quiet night, fire and friends. David Merritt's voice and the instant thoughtful mood it puts me into, and as a reminder of campfires. [Katherine]

Body surfing at the front beach on an Easter camp around 1990.

A 46 degree day lying in the bushes at Storm Point.

Eating raw steak on a night at one of my first 5 camps.

On New Year's Day 1993, on my first Cooinda camp, I woke up and wriggled out of my sleeping bag to watch a glorious sunrise over the water on Ninety Mile Beach. Nine years later Andy asked me to marry him, down in the sand on one knee on that same stretch of beach. Thank you, Cooinda, for filling my life with the most amazing experiences, both big and small. With my best wishes from our home in the Solomon Islands to everyone at the 50th Reunion, Lou G.

1984/85: Camping on 90 mile beach; total fire ban day so all tinned food had to be eaten cold – including the horrendous tinned nutmeat (the expeditioning person was a vegetarian). There was an amazing thunderstorm that night. About 3 patrols sat on the beach and watched the show. About 10 minutes later it bucketed down and everything was drenched – nutmeat and all!

Christine and Carolyn program directing in dungarees. Everything was written on notepads, "Women in overalls".

2009: The epic rescue of an injured magpie from the top of a tree. A magpie managed to tangle itself in fishing line and snag itself at the top of a tree. In the true Cooinda spirit, me and another leader scaled the tree and freed the magpie, almost getting stuck ourselves....this will live on with us for a long time.

Scaring campers while sailing pacers. They calmed down once I told them I was heeling deliberately. Summer 2009/10, [Martin]

Being a patrol leader and changing the time back 1 hour on NYE and the patrol not realising!

It's a blur of great memories, but actually what stands out is that in 6 or so camps I only have 2 bad memories.....of some slightly dodgy leaders.

My best memory is when I spent my first night at Cooinda Island.

Singing Titanic and Celine Dion on top of the launch and getting banned thereafter by Pete.

On New Years Eve with the glow of the phosphorescence on the water and the fireworks in the sky. 2008, [Josh]

My favourite memory from Cooinda was our amazing skit – we imitated people around the camp! [Emily]

Laughing, playing games and toasting marshmallows around the campfire.

Paddling to Sale and back.

David's guided walks to Duck Arm by torchlight, the Indian story [Wowasa], camaraderie rebuilding after the fires, camping on the Ninety Mile beach dunes, the village – spit roasts, work parties, Den of Nargun rafting, we made all the bunk covers after the fire and we cut the material too small, none of them fitted.

Being lost, waiting for and finally seeing the launch arrive to rescue us!

Family camps 1996, 1998, 2001: Meeting the people I had seen in photos or had heard Don mention during Cooinda stories. Having the kids playing on the beach together as toddlers – the next generation of campers who now enjoy the summer camps 12 years later on. [Sonia]

Being given stale tacos for an expedition so the next time we went out they loaded us up. Three of the guys decided to make sure everything got eaten including the beetroot juice!

New Year's Eve at Nicholson - it rained and rained and was a washout. Ended up sleeping in the shearing shed. Ate a breakfast of mulberry pancakes.

Leading the lantern walk on the 35th anniversary weekend, such an honour.

As a camper, leader, co-director, and a brief stint on the committee of management from about 1974 to 1986, what I remember the most are the wonderful opportunities for exploring, trying things for the first time, and developing friendships that endure to this day. Becoming a leader at Cooinda gave me the chance to develop as a person in a way that I don't believe I could have found anywhere else. I am extremely grateful for the experiences it offered me. [Pip]

Sleeping under the stars in amongst the sand dunes on 90 mile beach.

The night on the Island that Joel and I had help with our patrol from Mark and Andrew. We hung out all night and watched the stars. It was great to have the help! Especially with that patrol. That year there was also phosphorescence in the water. It was beautiful. [Billie, 2008-09]

Fishing on the Nicholson River and catching 7 tailor and having them for dinner that night. Ninety Mile beach over night expeditions – New Year's Eve – wind, waves and sand. The tarp tents. A great place to paint!

New Year's on 90 Mile beach.

The Great Fish Incident: Travelling back from camping at Wattle Point because we couldn't make it to Waddy, we met fishermen who loaded our canoes with fish! 103 fish!! We decided to tell everyone we had caught them ourselves..... 2 patrols headed out the next day to fish where we had camped. I believe this lie featured in the book. We ended up in Kangaroo Court.

My best memory of Cooinda is falling instantly and permanently in love with Cooinda the first time arrived there. It always seemed perfect to me - better than home or anywhere else.

1995/1996, Andy and Louisa's patrol. The exhilaration of having reached the Nicholson the long way around – the other way around Lake King. The drama of a leader cutting his toe on a piece of glass as he stepped (barefoot) into the river. The frustration of trying to erect a shelter in a storm. Salvation! Wally invites the whole patrol to spend New Year's Eve in his sheep shed. Still the most memorable New Year's Eve of my life.

Sleeping high up in the sand dunes of Ninety Mile Beach. Sand in the curry sausages from the fire pit that kept collapsing. Getting 'lost' on a long late night walk with some girls. Struggling to find a spot that was dry under the tarp of tied together tents. Best night ever!

Russell Smith, 1960: Setting out on an expedition (1960) and being stranded on Spermwhale Head to make camp – being blown apart in a massive storm – being rescued by David M with the launch at 2 am – having a hot chocolate in the dining hall to warm up – and back to our tent for a warm sleep.

Mmmmm...pineapple upside down cake.....changing kids' perceptions of how camp food can actually be!

Kayaking across to Rotamah Island. Sleeping the in the sand dunes. Socialising in the kitchen, listening to the guitars etc from the Yacht Club.

Amazing phosphorescence in the Lakes. Falling asleep at 10.30 pm on New Year's Eve along with the rest of the patrol at Nicholson River.

So many little memories all merge.....sun, wind, wet, cold, hot, fire (camp fires!), laughs, food, dirt, kero lanterns, great people, paddling exhaustion and David's stories. [David]

Cooinda was and remains a significant and important part of my life. Shared experiences, challenges, fun, important and significant friendships.

2006/07: The patrol was sleeping under the tarp at Bunga Arm until it started to pour down. Shortly, the water started to come inside, so in my underwear and a Japara, I ventured out to fix the problem and was the hero for the rest of camp. [Mark]

Spending my birthday on camp for 11 years!

Being in a pacer with Dan, and sailing into a canoe fleet of Narguns on the way home from a 4 day trip. We did it only to annoy them.

Staying overnight at the Outpost. No-one packed a can opener which was needed for access to our lunch, dinner and breakfast! Instead we sat around the fire eating Weetbix with jam.

Fishing off Duck Arm in a big wind and catching dozens of taylor as they sheltered in the lee of the wind. Those wonderful lantern walks and the fabulous hot chocolate afterwards. The smell of the fuel in the lanterns. Pollywaffles from the canteen..... Volleyball whenever. The hilarity of the raft.

Groakers! Circa 1976. We were the best!

What happened to the raft? Lots of zinc cream and aeroguard, bracken, camp fires.

1960s: The fire days (without south westerlies!) on the beach – as a mother of campers and the wife of a sailing instructor. Dave singing to our kids at nights in our big tent, especially Puff the Magic Dragon and Ricky Icky (?) [Margaret]

Swimming in Duck Arm with the family. I was 4 and unable to swim. My brother Steve pulled me up when I bumped into his legs.

My camera, which I left behind on a tree at 90 Mile Beach was found a year later by a camper from another camp. The film was developed and a certain person, namely Carolyn, was identified in a number of the photos. The camera found its way back to me.

Hearing the book 'The Fuzzies' read to us in the tree house by our leader Marg. I was in Grade 5. Also, after the fire, the amazing response – everyone helping us to rebuild. As a young leader – having a great New Year's Eve with a fun group of 16 year olds.

A well remembered moment. When the wooden one-man kayaks, built by Ian and me, were launched and used by campers, circa 1964-65. [George]

We had experienced several days of strong westerlies and 2 patrols has been isolated on Spermwhale Head for 2 days. It was decided to organise a rescue mission. Ulysses was made ready and headed out from Point Turner. Some time later we noticed we were going backwards and Spermwhale Head was disappearing so we turned for home. Next we decided to carry out the rescue with the Coonawarra (sailing boat). Three quarters of the way across, one of the stays broke which meant we could only sail on one tack. The rescue was aborted and we headed to Raymond Island. We made it and moored the Coonawarra on Raymond Island. Next day we found it on the bottom of the lake.

I had a great time helping prepare food in the kitchen and sharing many happy stories with happy staff. The kids, Nate, Rebecca and Belinda all have very fond memories of Camp Cooina.

I swam in phosphorescence off the Island.

Canoeing underwater at Duck Arm. Jellyfish slicing, with paddles. Random hugs. Extreme storms. Truth of dare. Nuddy runs. Mulberry tree. And a lot of toilet holes.

Enjoy is not only in the past memories of camps. It is in the memories that keep on being made even outside the Cooina environment with the friends made.

2009-2010, Camp 1: Canoeing to Nicholson, we made it all the way to the end of the Mitchell River silt jetty in rough weather but couldn't make the crossing because of a thunderstorm forecast. The sky was clear blue! Even though we were disappointed that we would be lifted by car, defeated by that last 200m, everyone had great fun and kept great spirits even though we were soggy and tired. It should have been bad but the team was what made it a great memory.

Mosquitos, sheep jokes, sing-a-longs, sleeping under the stars, food with dirt, camp fire talk, paddling games, toileting in a hole, swimming for hours in the Nicholson, 90 Mile Beach, waking up with the birds, indescribable personalities, initiative games.

Walking back from Dave Merritt's camp fire stories and seeing phosphorescence in the water. And nuddy runs!

Canoeing, polar bear awards, David and Joy, Ants, disagreeable and inconvenient weather, jellyfish, hiking in circles, games, Plover Point: 100+ kms, 10kg of cheese and 100,000 mozzie bites; Narguns Bay, dolphins, kitchen headaches, actually catching lots of fish; expeditioning, capsizing, sleeping on the beach.

Canoeing to Bunga Arm; village camps; Easter service singing a duet; lantern walk; train ride from Melbourne to Bairnsdale; work party weekends; 1978 bushfire.

A camp 5 expedition in the mirrors. We got to Storm Point so early we decided to push on and be the first ever group to reach Lake Wellington in mirrors. All was going well until the wind died on us in McClellan Straits and we had to paddle the last part with barrel lids – hard work! It was night by the time got there. The next morning trying to get back the tides were against us and the water flowing so hard in the wrong direction through the straits that each time we tacked we went backwards almost as much as the progress we had just made tacking. The hardest sailing and expedition I've ever done. I'm not surprised it has never been done again!!

Walking an all girls patrol through the shallows in a rain and wind storm with some girls keeping the canoes afloat, some girls seated in the canoes, and all of us sharing food and singing constantly. [Christine]