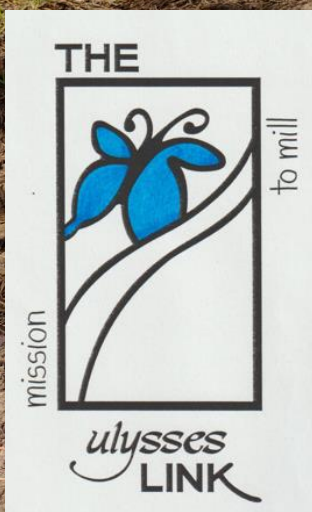


CONNECTING COMMUNITIES ... A VISION REALISED

Penny Phillips and the *Ulysses Link* foreshore trails

ABRIDGED VERSION



KEN GRAY

Published by

Mission Beach Historical Society Inc.

Document AB26 Version 1.0.

Web address: www.mbhs.com.au



This publication is copyright © Mission Beach Historical Society Inc.

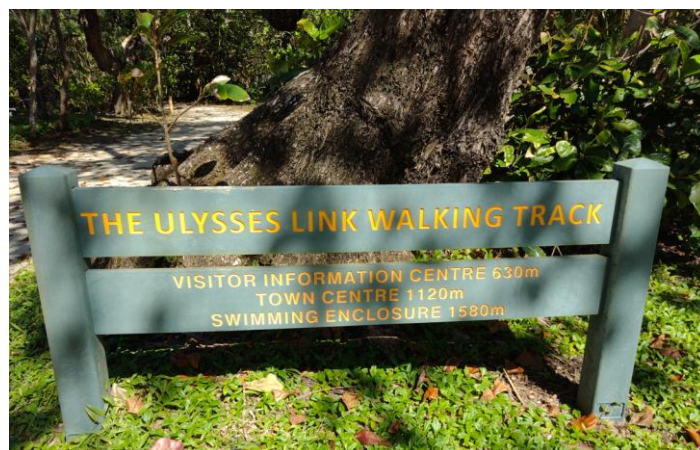
First published in 2024.

Author: Ken Gray. *Editors:* Penny Phillips, David Devine, Margaret Remilton and Meryl Harding.

Apart from fair dealing for private study, research, criticism, or review, as permitted by the Copyright Act, no part of this work may be stored, reproduced, or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission. Inquiries should be directed to the publisher. This title is recorded at the National Library of Australia (eBook) and the State Library of Queensland (Print and eBook).

The text and opinions expressed in this book are those of the author and people interviewed by the author and do not reflect the views of the Mission Beach Historical Society Inc., or its members. The logo for Mission Beach Historical Society was designed by Leonard Andy, who is copyrighted. The design depicts a Djiru shield with a cassowary, an endangered and iconic flightless bird that lives in the north Queensland rainforests.

The histories published by Mission Beach Historical Society Inc., are as accurate as we can make them. There are few history accounts that are 100% accurate, and there will be more errors when we recall events from many years ago. We always welcome suggestions for edits, additions, or deletions, and we will correct any errors we find.



Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the following people for their generous assistance with stories and images to make this story possible: Penny Phillips, David and Sandy Devine, Truus Biddlecombe, Steve Russell and Meryl Harding.

Cover: A small spur track from *Ulysses Link* foreshore track to the sand on Mission Beach overlooking Dunk Island.

PENNY PHILLIPS – ULYSSES VISION

Penny and Roger Phillips came from South Australia to live in Mission Beach in 1994. They established the popular *Flying Pig Delicatessen*, in a shopping centre at Mission Beach which was promoted widely using a pink fibreglass flying pig on top of a red sign.



Penny Phillips, a positive force: Coordinator Medical Training, James Cook University, Cairns, supporting med students in their clinical years.

Penny came up with the idea of building a walking and cycling track that runs along the entire length of the Mission Beach district foreshore. Penny's vision was to have a foreshore path linking all the district's beachside communities ... a track linking the *Kennedy Walking Track* to Bingil Bay.

Few could argue with this beachside track, but Penny faced strident opposition from some quarters, as invariably happens in small towns. The same thing happened when Len Staff, a former resident of Wongaling Beach, proposed building the *Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track* in 1984. He had little community support and faced vigorous opposition from some influential residents, the Tully newspaper, and even many Cardwell Shire Council people. Nonetheless, he gathered together an enthusiastic community team and constructed it.

Penny and her team decided that the initial stage of the project would be to build a small section of the link from the Visitor Information Centre to Koda Street in Wongaling Beach with a bridge over Porters Creek. Much work was done on the plans, but red tape stood in the way of her plan to build the bridge over Porters Creek. She decided to lower her sights a little and build a section from the *Cutten Walking Track* to the Visitors Information Centre with an Art Plaza near the Johnstone Shire Council foreshore camping ground.

Ever the optimist, Penny, who in 2023 is at the start of a long overseas adventure, remains convinced that completion of the full foreshore trail will eventually happen. When departing on her exciting new journey, she said, *I would still love to see a bridge over Porters Creek, that would be the jewel in the crown. It is such a pivotal piece of infrastructure for Mission Beach that would provide access to a unique section of coastal vegetation, providing a real contrast to the other more inhabited sections of the Ulysses Link.*

Len and Penny were both unphased by opposition to their ideas and worked hard to fight community apathy and demonstrate the benefits of their vision. Both of these projects were tremendous successes and brought enormous benefits to the community and its economy.

ULYSSES LINK PLANNING

To turn her vision into reality, Penny recruited a steering group of interested residents and business owners and shared with them what she hoped to achieve, inviting their input and involvement in July 1998. Many of these people were office bearers in important community groups in Mission Beach. The *Ulysses Link* Team was: Penny Phillips Team Leader, Karen Schmidt, Truus Biddlecombe, Rhonda Murdoch, Mary Ritchie, John Waldren, Ken Gray, Liz Goodhew and Don Marsh. In publicity documents, the vision was shortened to *Mission to Mill*, which was depicted as a path from the old South Mission Beach 'mission' site to the Cutten-Garner timber mill in Bingil Bay. Penny saw opportunities presented by the Centenary of Federation Community Funds/Queensland Heritage Trails Network. Some of this funding would be allocated to the Kennedy Electorate, why not Mission Beach!

Penny's first moves were to test the reactions to the concept with government and other organisations. She communicated with residents and community organisations to refine the plans. When the plans were close to completion, there was a public meeting to gain agreement on the route.

The initial plan was to construct a 3 km track between Koda Street in Wongaling and the Mission Beach Visitor Information Centre in Porter Promenade, Mission Beach. The steering group drew up a plan for that to show the community. The budget of \$351,000 was pruned to \$78,000.

The proposals were received enthusiastically by organisations consulted including Lions, C4, Rotary, Wongaling Beach and South Mission Beach Progress Association, Mission Beach P & C Association, Tully High School P & C, Probus, RMRAC, Cassowary Coast Development Bureau, Inner Wheel, and Johnstone Shire Cultural Association.

As with the *Kennedy Walking Track* which was built a few years earlier, there was an early stumbling block due to strong resistance from a few beachfront property owners. Penny could have proceeded without the approval of property owners because the land being used is owned by the State and managed by the Council. Some property owners had illegally built infrastructure and gardens on the State-owned Esplanade land and did not want that disturbed and/or want the public traversing the public land near to their homes.

Penny reduce conflicts with property owners by relocating the path and making the project less ambitious. At least she would make a start, and people could see that the path was sustainable and well-loved.

OUTCOMES

After much planning, the next step was to win funding. The team worked hard to develop a compelling case and were rushing at the last minute to meet the deadlines for applications.

From the beginning of the project, Johnstone Shire Council Division 3 Councillor, Steve Russell, was heavily involved. Steve advocated long and hard in Council for the project in the face of quite fierce resistance in the beginning. He approached Cardwell Shire Council for their support as well without success but battled on. Steve experienced some robust and unpleasant resistance as well from some Innisfail councillors and beachfront owners.

In October 1999, Penny needed the Johnstone Shire General Manager, Eddie McEachan, to sign the funding application. She made a frantic dash to catch Eddie while he was attending the opening of the Jorissen Bridge on Garners Beach Road. With no time to spare, Penny interrupted proceedings and thrust a pen into Eddie's

hand and asked him to sign. Fortunately, Eddie knew the project well and supported it wholeheartedly, so he did not hesitate.

In the Cairns Post, on April 27, 2001, there was an update on the progress of the project. The track was near to completion at the time and was expected to be ready for the opening in July and the Centenary of Federation celebrations in September.

David Devine was appointed to oversee the construction of the path and bridge and was ably assisted by a team of six Aboriginal youths. They did an excellent job and finished on time and on budget. Penny found David to be an amazing project manager who worked well with the team. He procured the telegraph poles that were used for the bridge piles and said that involved a few cartons of ale and was an excellent deal.

CONSTRUCTION



Bridge over a small watercourse at the north end being built - David Devine (centre) with a team of Aboriginal youths who built the structure.

After Penny asked him to project-manage the job, David Devine walked the proposed length with council officers and was informed of the requirements to satisfy the rules such as wheel-chair access and the suggested purchase of a pre-fab bridge to span the creek. That cost approximately \$25,000.

The work team was made up of five local indigenous young guys and one female. They were completing a construction course with Cairns Regional Training and this project was part of the practical components of the qualification. David was asked by council to list the required tools and was surprised when he collected the tools because they were brand new and were paid out of the grant money and not never expected them to be returned!

While Cardwell Shire Council had been averse to building the Kennedy Walking Track in 1988, they quickly realised that these foreshore trails were incredibly popular once locals saw them and used them. Furthermore, they were well appreciated and widely used by tourists and were soon featured widely on tourism websites adding to the attractiveness of the region as a destination.

When Penny approached Johnstone Shire Council about the *Ulysses Link* proposals, there was no hesitation at all. The project became a successful community and Council joint venture.

The Queensland Arts Minister, Matt Foley, described it as a significant environmental, cultural, and educational attraction for the Far North. The track begins at the market's precinct and travels 1.3 km to Clump Point. The Minister said that the aim of the project was to reinstate degraded areas of the frontal dune, while developing recreational facilities, enabling visitors to interpret historical, cultural, and environmental values of the district.

This section of the trail was only 1.3 km stretching from the market's piazza south of the CCRC camping ground to the Cutten Walking Track at Clump Point. There was no plan to build a bridge over the creek passing beside the camping ground, so the walk detoured for a short distance and followed the street (Porter Promenade) a short distance before returning to the foreshore route.

EARLY FORESHORE WALKING TRACKS

Cutten Walking Track

Some suggest that this path was originally a route used by the Djiru people before European settlement. While that is highly likely, it is unknown. A rough path was constructed to connect with the Cuttens' Bicton settlement in Bingil Bay when farmers settled at Mission Beach in the early 1900s. The path route fell into disuse in the 1930s, but it was reopened in 1946 when a telephone line was built on it, which was hanging from the trees.

A Rotary team started planning the path's reopening in 1987 and in 1999-2000 they worked with Johnstone Shire Council to re-construct it with funding from the Commonwealth Bicentennial fund, Council, Coastal Care, and Rotary. The path was upgraded by Rotary and the Cassowary Coast Regional Council at a cost of \$30,000. It was destroyed by Cyclone Yasi in 2011. Bendigo and Adelaide Bank donated \$10,000 to the project, while Rotary and Council provided the remaining funds.

It is named *The Cutten Brothers Walking Track* on nearby signs but has recently been referred to more appropriately as *The Cutten Walking Track*, reflecting the reality that it was built in memory of the entire Cutten family, not just the four 'Cutten Brothers.' This is essentially a walking path rather than a cycling path because it has some steps.

In mid-2023, CCRC replaced a 90-metre section of boardwalk on the track using long-lasting, slip resistant, plastic recycled plastic decking.

Kennedy Bay Walking Track

After several years of concerted action by conservationists of the Tully Branch of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland (WPSQ), to achieve protected reserves for land at Kennedy Bay, it was decided that the best way to ensure the land's conservation was to create a scenic walkway.

Len Staff of Wongaling initiated the project and with the assistance of WPSQ, won \$40,000 of Bicentennial funds in 1986 for the construction of his Heritage Project. The track was to be named in memory of the landing of Edmund Kennedy and his exploration team in 1848.

Len called a public meeting to garner community support but found that few were interested and only five people, including himself and the Mayor, attended. Cardwell Shire Council was not interested, and many residents were openly hostile to the proposal.

The Edmund Kennedy Memorial Walking Track was officially opened by Kerry Goodall, Deputy Chair of the Queensland Bicentennial Council on May 29, 1988. There were hundreds of attendees and a re-enactment of the Kennedy Expedition landing took place. The proposal had created much division and angst at the beginning, but once the community saw it, they were quickly appreciative of its value. As soon as a short part of the track was completed people started using it.

The Kennedy Walking Track was rebuilt by Cardwell Council in 2005 after being destroyed by Cyclone Larry.

PROGRESS SINCE 2001

The *Cutten Walking Track* was re-constructed at the same time as the *Ulysses Link*, so two sections of the foreshore trail were functional in 2001. That addition greatly enhanced the functionality of and interest in the *Ulysses Link*. The *Kenned Walking Track* was refurbished in 2005.

After Cyclone Larry (2006) destroyed the sealing on large parts of Alexander Drive where it hugs the sea alongside Bicton Hill, CCRC reconstructed the road and protected it from future damage using a robust rock levee. They wisely chose to seal a narrow cycle and walking path alongside the road adding a further 1.3 km to the *Ulysses Link* foreshore paths. In the time that Margaret Darveniza was Director of Community Services at Cassowary Coast Regional Council from 2013 to 2016, she advanced the foreshore trails considerably. The Council Officer who managed the extension projects and maintained the paths was Damon Sydes, Technical Officer Environment. Damon is the officer in charge of all the paths and their maintenance today.

CCRC added a \$75,000 bridge and boardwalk at the creek beside the CCRC camping ground to save people having to detour onto Porter Promenade. That section was an instant success as soon as it was completed and remains highly popular. It is maintained weekly by C4 volunteers who blow the leaf debris from the bridge and the *Ulysses Link* pathways that meander through the Norm Byrnes Arboretum.

The next section that Damon Sydes at Council constructed was another valuable link from the south end of Narragon Beach (in Boat Bay) to the Perry Harvey Jetty. That was only 300 metres in length but was a difficult challenge for it involved removal of a vast midden of around 30,000 broken bottles left by those staying for many years at the Johnstone Mill Camp in the mill offseason. The broken bottles were a severe environmental hazard and would ultimately have been tossed into the sea and strewn over the beaches by a cyclone. That was a brilliant outcome and extended the *Cutten Walking Track* through further seaside bushland.

Another extension of *Ulysses Link* occurred soon after when a section from the market's piazza to the end of Conch Street was completed by Damon Sydes in 2016/17. That added a further 1.4 km to the trail.

In 2023, CCRC built another 0.6 km stretch to join Bingil Bay BBQs to the Bingil Bay Café. The Bingil Bay BBQ facility was an excellent addition to the Link, also in the period when Margaret Darveniza was leading the charge to improve the tourist potential of Mission Beach.

By 2023, 60% of the *Ulysses Link* was completed: that is almost 12 km of the near 20 km total length of the envisioned foreshore following *Ulysses Link*.

CCRC built a further 6.2 km of associated detour trails where they have as yet been unable to follow along the foreshore zone. One was a 4.2 km section from Mission Beach to Wongaling following the main roads and cutting across MARCS Park to provide safe access to the Aquatic Centre. That includes the 0.6 km section along Wongaling Beach Road. In 2019, a bitumen pathway was constructed from the Ergon Station in South Mission Beach to the CCRC rubbish tip in Wheatley Road and a gravel path extended from the tip to Nissen Street. In 2023, CCRC completed that detour section with a concrete footpath going from Kennedy Esplanade to join onto that Ergon station path.

The section of track from Nissen Street to Kennedy Esplanade could be a challenge in future. Wheatley Creek moves quite radically over the years, so is difficult to bridge and there are sections of National Park where Council has no jurisdiction, so that may be a barrier one day. There is a basic walking path through part of that section starting at the end of the Kennedy Esplanade's northern extension.