

SKETCHES by BEACH HISTORIANS

BUDS OF TOURISM

Tourism is the main industry of Mission Beach and this Sketch is about where and how it started.

The *Cairns Post* in 1928 published *Clump Point Notes*, reporting on the Progress Association meeting:¹

Mr. Toohar, of Daradgee, has built a cottage here and so have some others. One day there will be a township here. ... The weather is most beautiful for the picnickers and the sea all that could be desired for the bathers: even they have taken to running down on these beautiful moonlight nights to have a dip and home again; truly the advent of the motor car has radically altered the aspect of country life; both for pleasure and for work. ... Mr. Garner's beach is the favourite haunt of the fishing people ...

This article correctly underlined the importance of motor vehicles to open up tourism in this district. The Cuttens had subdivided part of their land near the beachfront in 1926,² and a few adventurous souls started building holiday 'homes' at Bingil Bay. Just before the 1918 cyclone, when the Cuttens were growing older and struggling to make ends meet, they advertised in the newspapers for someone with capital to build a *tourist seaside hotel* on their land. They already saw tourism as the future for the district.

It had been a long struggle to get a 'road' built from El Arish to Bingil Bay as both Councils were reluctant to provide any funding. In the end, the Cutten, Alexander, Garner and Mackness families built a track themselves in 1924 and the only help they had from Johnstone Shire Council was bolts for the bridges over Muff and Maria Creeks. Ted Garner expressed the settlers' considerable frustration:³

...we [settlers] have been paying rates since 1888. ... From 1888 until 1923 the council did not expend one farthing for any road to Clump Point. We have paid sufficient rates to have all Innisfail Streets with paving stones, and still they pass us by.

Sounds familiar – high rates and little infrastructure in return for Mission Beach. Residents of the district have often held such significant concerns over the years. The 'road' they built was little more than a dray track, yet on dry days trucks could get through with although some difficulty. The road was not properly made until 1936, and the section to Tully took almost three more years to complete.

The first holiday accommodation in the district was in huts built by Ted Garner which were run by his wife, Edith Garner in 1924. In January 1925 these were already reported as being popular.⁴ They started

¹ *Clump Point Notes*, Progress Association, *Cairns Post* 27 October 1928, accessed on Trove, April 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/40644197?searchTerm=Clump%20Point%20Notes.%20Progress%20Association>

² Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022, P. 41.

³ E. Garner, *Harsh Treatment*, *Cairns Post*, 14 July 1934, accessed on Trove, April 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/41508624?searchTerm=Harsh%20Treatment>

⁴ *A New Town on the Map*, Townsville Daily Bulletin, 16 January 1925, accessed on Trove, April 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/61570136?searchTerm=A%20New%20Town%20on%20the%20Map>

with five galvanized iron huts and added two cottages later and were well patronized for many years. The accommodation was named *Nee Mournna* using a name applied to the beach, meaning Laughing Waters, according to Edmund Banfield. It is not a Djiru name, however.



The condition of access roads limited Clump Point tourism in the early days.

Their accommodation capacity was often augmented by camping on the beachfront nearby. However, with the Depression deepening in the 1930s, the Garner family generously threw open their accommodation and fruit farm to many destitute families who came to recover, then moved on for others to benefit from this wonderful healing place.

The next tourist accommodation venture was more huts on the beachfront at Bingil Bay in 1926. These were built by Charles Alexander and run by his wife, Gertrude. In 1927, they added a 40-bed building named *Alexanders' Inn* and later named it *Alexanders' Temperance Hotel*. That was also well patronized, but Gertrude died in 1934 and the business closed.⁵

Most the tourists came from the hinterland; El Arish, Silkwood, Mena Creek and, soon after, Tully and Innisfail people came as well. Word was spreading about what a stunning destination Clump Point was:⁶

Mr. M. O'Callaghan, secretary of the Chamber of Commerce [Townsville] has returned from a short holiday at Clump Point and speaks in superlative terms of the great attractions of the place as a holiday resort. He says he has seen nothing in the North to compare with the beaches of Clump Point. Excellent seaside accommodation is supplied in a number of huts which have been provided by Mrs. Garner.

By the end of 1926, a few lorries and sometimes cars were able to access Mission Beach from Tully, though it was difficult in the wet. One report said: *The Hull Beach is now definitely established as the weekend seaside resort of Tully. Lorries and cars leave every Sunday and within a few hours the beach is reached. Vehicles may go right onto the beach, which is nice hard, firm sand.* In August 1927, the Tully Ambulance Brigade took 23 hours to travel from Tully to Mission Beach and back when they were bogged 12 times. It was noted, however, in December 1926 that, *as many as 200 people visit this picturesque spot [Bingil Bay] every weekend now.*

Picnics and camping for people from nearby towns were increasingly popular, and the Tully Ambulance Brigade had a big picnic involving 300 people and 40 vehicles in late 1927, with refreshments and fruit

⁵ Ken Gray, *Bicton: The Cuttens of Clump Point*, Mission Beach Historical Society, 2022, P. 59.

⁶ *Clump Point*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, April 1926, accessed on Trove, April 2022 at: <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/60940211?searchTerm=Clump%20Point>

being supplied. Water was sometimes short, and children started selling it to the visitors. There was an application for a hotel at Bingil Bay in 1928, but that did not win approval.

In 1934, there was a visit by the Minister for Lands, Percy Pease who promised a new road from El Arish to Bingil Bay and predicted that the Clump Point district would become a popular tourist resort. By 1936, soon after the new road was opened, tourism escalated quickly. Council passed a motion to provide toilets, change sheds and water at Bingil Bay, and they reported that, *in one week a "bottle-O" had taken away three lorry loads of empty bottles from Bingil Bay*. An application was made for a refreshment booth at Bingil Bay in that year, and a Surf Lifesaving Club was started by El Arish residents there.

It was in May 1936 that the tourism promotion stepped up a little when Hugo and Christa Brassey opened up their new resort on Dunk Island, with their Honeymoon Bungalows. They were well connected and Hugo's Aunt, Lady Gowrie and her husband, Lord Gowrie, Governor General of Australia, arrived soon after on the HMAS *Australia II*, Australia's flagship cruiser, to open the new dance hall at the resort. That venture was short-lived and collapsed when the couple divorced two years later. Hugo enlisted in the Royal Navy for WWII.

Council appointed R. Law as a beach inspector for Bingil Bay in December 1937. In 1938, Council also passed a motion to build camping grounds at Bingil Bay, so tourist numbers were rising. On Boxing Day 1938, the Protestant Labour Party of Tully advertised a *Monster Protestant Picnic at Mission Beach offering sports, amusements, surfing, refreshments for sale and free hot water*. Some papers reported over 800 people attended and some said over 1,000.

Boating to bring visitors to the district and take them on joy rides and to the Reef started first in 1924, with Ted Cutten providing the service. Others to follow included Nobby Whiting in 1929 who operated out of the Hull River. Howard Smith started another launch operating at Dunk Island when Hugo Brassey set up his resort there in 1936. Reef tourism started later in earnest with Les Campbell probably being the first operator, then Perry Harvey.

Accommodation became a far bigger business with the arrival of the motel concept and that began with the construction of *The Moonglow Motel* in 1961 by Gwen and Jack Romano. Soon after, Iris and Howard Watson opened their *Blue Pacific Motel* at Bingil Bay.



A typical beach picnic in the 1930s – this one was not at Mission Beach.



Bingil Bay circa 1930 with the first holiday cottages in the left foreground and Alexander's Inn near the hill by the beach

This Sketch is merely a start to the history of tourism at Mission Beach, and it is hoped that in the near future, someone with detailed knowledge of the industry and the changes over the years will write the full story.

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